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Quis nunc WESSELI frontem: quis lumina sculpat?
Talia sed tanti finge fuisse viri.
Mors habet atra fuit quicquid mortale creatum;
Sola sed æternum mens pia vivit ovans.
Mentem sancta Viri vivam monumenta figurant.
Mentem, non mentum, respice si quis amas.

GERH. GANSEFOORT.

WESSEL GANSFORT

LIFE AND WRITINGS

BY

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PRINCIPAL WORKS

TRANSLATED BY

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"If I had read his works earlier my enemies might think that Luther had absorbed everything from Wessel, his spirit is so in accord with mine."
—*Luther's Letter to Rhodius.*

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOLUME ONE

ILLUSTRATED

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
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The Gansfort Coat of Arms

This study of Wessel Gansfort was undertaken at the suggestion and has been carried forward under the generous encouragement of Mrs. Abraham Lansing, née Catherine Gansevoort, of Albany, New York, whose interest therein is due to her descent from the family of this distinguished Dutch theologian.

The American branch of the Gansfort family, which has given to this country some notable public men and gallant soldiers, has always cherished its old-world traditions and retained the family coat of arms. Several of its members have made pilgrimage to Groningen, in northern Holland, affectionately regarded by them as their mother-city.

While visiting there with his family in 1860, Peter Gansevoort, the father of Mrs. Lansing, reverently witnessed the removal of the bones of Wessel from their original resting-place in the cloister of the Spiritual Virgins and their re-interment with impressive ceremonies in the venerable Church of St. Martin. At the same time, also, were begun those radical alterations which have changed the house in which Wessel was born and lived as a child into the modernized structure which now bears the Gansfort coat of arms.

In the journal of Henry S. Gansevoort, who accompanied his father to Groningen, there is an extended account of these incidents in their visit to the family shrine. The interest thus early awakened led him in after years to undertake a translation into English of Professor William Muurling's admirable treatise on Wessel.

Thus in her patronage of the present effort to present to English readers this mediæval scholar and reformer, Mrs. Lansing confirms the interest of her family in its most famous representative, and fulfills the purpose of her beloved and lamented brother.

E. W. M.

New York,
April, 1917.

FOREWORD

THE four-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation may well revive interest in the precursors of the Reformers. The Protestant movement is no longer regarded as in the nature of a revolution, but as the product of tendencies long developing in the medieval Church and society. The intellectual ancestors of the Reformers have been discovered, and the roots of the political and social changes that accompanied the introduction of Protestantism have been traced far back into the preceding centuries.

Among those who unquestionably made important contribution to the preparation of the Rhine region for the acceptance of the Protestant doctrine was Wessel Gansfort who began and ended his life in the city of Groningen, in the northern Netherlands. He has been somewhat neglected by recent students of the origins of Protestantism, although Ullmann had honored him with the foremost place among his Reformers before the Reformation. That he has not attracted more attention may be due, as Luther suggests, to his quiet, uneventful career as a man of the schools. There were no dramatic episodes in his life, no clashes with the civil or ecclesiastical authority, no occasions for the display of heroic courage. Once for a little time he consciously faced the fire, but a powerful friend promptly intervened and saved him from the threatened ordeal.

That he has not attracted the attention of American scholars may be explained, in part at least, by the fact that so few copies of his works are to be found in this country.

From a recently conducted questionnaire, in which enquiry was sent to over a hundred of our leading libraries, it would appear that not more than a half-dozen copies of Wessel's writings are accessible to American students. As might be expected, the New Brunswick Theological Seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church has the largest collection of his writings. But this consists of only two volumes; the small, crudely printed first edition of the *Farrago*, and the complete edition of his surviving works issued in Groningen in 1614. This complete edition is possessed also by the Andover-Harvard Seminary Library and has been recently acquired by that of Princeton. Union Seminary in New York City has a copy of one of the later editions of the *Farrago* handsomely bound in tooled vellum with Erasmus's devotional classic, the *Enchiridion*, a most significant combination. In the library of the Rochester Seminary are two copies of the edition of the *Farrago* issued in Basel in 1523. Luther's letter is prefixed as an introduction.

The New York City Library possesses three small volumes containing writings by Wessel, which once belonged to the famous collection of Richard Heber of London. They are bound alike and were printed by the same press, but offer no clue as to the time or place of their publication. One contains the treatise on Prayer, another that on the Eucharist and the third a collection of Letters with the Impugnatorium of Anthony de Castro, which is a violent attack upon Wessel's teachings regarding Indulgences. The contents of these three volumes, printed in identically the same form, together with the earliest edition of the *Farrago* form the chief material in a volume of Wessel's writings owned by Mrs. Abraham Lansing of Albany, N. Y., to whose father, Peter Gansevoort, it was presented by his friend, Harmanus Bleecker, Minister to The Hague, under Martin Van Buren.

Hitherto, apart from brief articles in biographical and religious encyclopedias, a life of Wessel can hardly be said to have been written in English. The scholarly treatment of Ullmann in his *Reformatoren vor der Reformation* was issued in English in 1855, but it presents Wessel in conjunction with several others and so subordinates the story of his life to the discussion of his theological views that it does not afford a very clear image of the man.

It is this simpler task that the present treatment undertakes. It attempts to set Wessel against the background of his times, tracing his development, evaluating his achievements, and offering a criticism of the three groups of writings that here appear in translation. It has seemed best not to detain the reader with the considerations that have led to the conclusions presented, nor to encumber the pages with references to authorities. So far as citations are made from the writings of Wessel contained in these volumes, the index will indicate their location. For other references, the student is referred to the admirable annotations in the biographies by Muurling and Ullmann.

The circumstances under which these studies have been pursued during the brief vacations permitted by the duties of an administrative position have imposed distinct limitations upon the field covered, and have made impossible those completer researches which residence abroad would have permitted. While intended for the ordinary reader of history rather than the technical scholar, it is hoped, that the more critical chapters toward the end of the biography and the translations that follow may be of important service to students of the Church of the fifteenth century. No attempt is here made at an exposition of Wessel's theological teachings, though the time is ripe for a revised edition of Ullmann's work in that field or an entirely new study in the light of modern theological criteria.

These studies have opened many tempting lines of investigation which students of the preparation for the Reformation may be disposed to follow, for example: What references to Wessel's teachings concerning the Eucharist are to be found in the correspondence of the Reformers relative to this sacrament? What edition or editions of the Scriptures does Wessel quote from so copiously? Are any fragments of his *Mare Magnum* to be found in the libraries of the Netherlands? Did any contemporary writers hold his opinion that there is no other purgatory than paradise? Whence did he derive his conception of an Eternal Gospel, and what place, if any, did it have in the teachings of the Reformers? Had he an original psychology? What were Wessel's exact relations to the Universities of Paris and Basel and Heidelberg? What were the influences alluded to by Luther and others which restricted the circulation of Wessel's writings both before and after they were printed?

The chief sources for a life of Wessel are the relatively few biographical references in his own writings and the sketch by Hardenberg, who wrote while there were still living many who knew Wessel intimately. This sketch, though fragmentary and marred by inaccuracies and material not germane to the subject, is invaluable. The still briefer sketch by Geldenhauer, written about the same time, adds little of importance. Besides the data afforded by the above, the writer has used freely the material gathered by Muurling, Ullmann, De Groot, and others. A translation of the early sketches of Wessel's life has been appended, partly for the use of those who may desire access to these hitherto inaccessible sources, and partly because they incorporate some human documents of inherent interest.

There are certain problems as to the sequence of events in Wessel's life that are quite insoluble because of the in-

adequate data and because as Bayle remarks "lies in abundance have been told about this remarkable man." Nevertheless, the main outlines of his career and character can be rather sharply drawn. They are determined by his location at certain educational centers and by his advocacy of certain philosophical theories and educational and reformatory policies. He was apparently a man without ambition for place or power and one who shrank from the responsibility and routine of official position. He refused to enter the monastic life or the priesthood, though these were the avenues to academic promotion. He declined a professorship in early life, and apparently held no official relationship to the University of Paris, where he was a prominent figure for half a generation. In later life his interest in the subjects of academic contention waned and he became engrossed in matters more distinctly religious. To this period belong most of his surviving writings.

So far as is known the accompanying translation of three groups of Wessel's writings is the first attempt to present his works in any other language than their original Latin. To this statement there is an interesting exception. During the early period of the Reformation so much importance was attached to his essay on the Dignity and Power of the Church and Proper Obedience thereto that it was translated into the German for popular distribution. A few copies of this brochure are still in existence, and have apparently come to light since Ullmann made his investigations. A photograph of the title-page of one of them, given by Professor Doedes to the University Library in Groningen, was made for use in this volume. Besides the writings of Wessel which here appear in translation, there are four other works, a theological treatise and three devotional writings. In bulk they are about twice as large as these translated, and constitute nearly two thirds of the thick volume of 921 pages in which are con-

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Wessel Gansfort

Wessel Gansfort

CHAPTER I

HIS IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT

In the history of modern times the Netherlands have played a part out of all proportion to their population and material resources. Like ancient Palestine and Greece they afford an example of a country small in area but large in influence. Even before the beginning of the modern era this group of tiny provinces about the mouth of the Rhine had given promise of its future industrial and political importance. Its hardy people, mainly of Germanic stock, had from the time of the Roman invasions shown a singular love of freedom and willingness to defend it at any cost. Their other qualities of inventiveness and patient determination had doubtless been developed by a constant contest with the ocean, from which their farmers had won their most fertile fields and their fishermen a large part of the nation's wealth. Remote and difficult of access as were many parts of the Netherlands, yet connection with the ancient Roman Empire and its Germanic successor, as well as early incorporation in the Church of Rome, had kept the country in the main currents of European life.

In the fifteenth century the Netherlands were in many respects the most highly developed country in northern Europe. Their numerous cities were hives of varied

industry and centers of international commerce. They were also nurseries of civil liberty. In no other land had agriculture and especially horticulture reached such a high state of development. In spite of a century of intermittent civil conflict and occasional foreign wars in which their ambitious princes had involved them, their proverbial industry and thrift had brought them great national wealth and commercial prosperity. Among all classes the standards of living and the average of intelligence were high. There were many good schools and a popular disposition to take advantage of them. Haarlem disputed with Mainz the honor of being the birthplace of printing, and other Dutch cities were early engaged in the publishing business.

The political evolution of the Netherlands from feudalism to a true national life had been interrupted by their becoming a part of the possessions of the powerful Dukes of Burgundy, who aimed to establish a centralized despotism in the place of the local self-government and chartered privilege which the people had obtained from their earlier feudal masters. The collapse of Burgundian ambition with the death of Charles the Bold in 1477 gave the Netherlands an opportunity to regain their lost liberties. Assembled in their first national congress, they obtained from his daughter Mary, as the price of their allegiance, a new constitution, the Great Privilege, which has been called the Magna Charta of the Netherlands, and was in a sense the foundation of the Dutch Republic.

It is significant that it was in the same year that the Great Privilege was granted that the first edition of the Bible in the Dutch language was issued. This early appearance of the Scriptures in the vernacular can only be explained by a popular demand for it, and this demand has its explanation in the permeation of the medieval Church in the Netherlands by the influence of a native

mysticism, which made much of the private reading of the Scriptures and immediate communion with God. This had brought about the revival of a simple piety which was quite independent of the ministries of the Church. Doubtless the influence of such teachers as Eckhart and Tauler had found its way down the Rhine and prepared the soil of the Netherlands for the Brethren of the Common Life and similar organizations among the laity for the cultivation of piety. These movements were not positively anticlerical, though their existence was an implication that the Church was neglecting her foremost function. In the general features of its administration the Church in the Netherlands in the fifteenth century was neither better nor worse than in the other provinces of the pope's domain. It was, however as we shall see, the object of incessant criticism even by some high in its official circles.

Nothing is more indicative of the intellectual and religious condition of the Netherlands at this time than the lay fraternity for the cultivation of piety and scholarship known as the Brethren of the Common Life. So far as the origin of this organization can be traced to a single man, the honor belongs to Gerhard Groot, who was born at Deventer in 1340. But a generation before Groot, mystical piety had its distinguished representative in the Netherlands in the person of John Ruysbroek, priest at St. Gudula in Brussels, and later first prior of the monastery of Grünthal. Apparently he was a disciple of Eckhart and undoubtedly a friend of Tauler. This constitutes him a personal link, probably one of many, between the mysticism of Germany and that of the Netherlands. Ruysbroek, who contrary to the custom of the times wrote in the vernacular, has been accounted the most effective Dutch writer of the Middle Ages. But even more influential than his somewhat voluminous writings was the impress which his pure and intense religious life made upon

his disciples and upon the monks in his monastery. Best known among the former is Gerhard Groot who fell under his influence when he was a lad of seventeen, became one of his followers, and later the translator of his writings into the Latin. As the founder of an educational system, he had every equipment which his age could afford. He studied at the cathedral school of his native town, then at the University of Paris, where, after the custom of the time, he devoted himself to a wide range of subjects including "theology, philosophy, medicine, canon law, astronomy, magic, and Hebrew." Later we find him at the universities of Cologne and Prague and at the papal court of Urban V at Avignon. A private fortune and the income of two deaneries had provided him the means for a rather luxurious life. But when thirty-four years of age, a serious illness became the occasion of a deep religious experience, which gave a new direction to his life. He resigned most of his income, devoted much of his time to study and prayer, and for three years retired to a monastery. Then began his brief career as a wandering lay-preacher to the common people, and a fearless critic of the abuses in the Church and in society. His ministry lasted less than four years, but it made a deep impression upon the multitudes that everywhere thronged to hear him and exerted a directive influence over the lives of a score or more of men of distinction. Feeling the need of better schools, especially for future priests, he associated with himself, at Deventer and Zwolle, a number of young men and boys whom he taught, and encouraged to support themselves by the transcription of religious books for him. To enable his scholars and teachers to live more economically, and doubtless also to intensify his influence over them, he later arranged to have them live together in one house like a little monastic community, but without vows and with freedom to come and go at will. So began an

institution which soon spread throughout the Netherlands and extended up the Rhine into Germany. The organization of the Brethren of the Common Life was such as to set them in sharp distinction from the monks and the friars, who were at first disposed to criticize and oppose them. The monks looked with disapproval upon their exemption from vows and their freedom of movement. The mendicants feared their influence, for instead of identifying piety with beggary, they made a point of supporting themselves by their own efforts. As communities of workmen they naturally excited the suspicion of the established trade guilds, while the zeal of their leaders in preaching to the common people raised an issue with the local church authorities. It was some years before the character of the movement was popularly understood and the Brethren were recognized and approved by the civil and ecclesiastical powers.

All that Gerhard Groot contributed to the movement was its spirit and general aim. His death occurred in 1384 when as yet there were but the two original communities at Deventer and Zwolle, and everything was in a formative stage. His disciples, notably Florentius, drew up the rules and completed the organization of the order. Its characteristic features may be thus summarized. The aim of the Brethren was threefold: to cultivate the religious life among themselves by what they called "modern devotion," to improve their minds by serious study, and to seek the betterment of the Church and the world. They sought to live a community life like that of the monks, but without taking the ordinary monastic vows. They rendered voluntary obedience to superiors chosen by themselves from their own number. They supported themselves by various industries carried on by the community, and they especially sought the edification of themselves and others by the reading of the Scriptures

in the vernacular. The purpose of the order is thus stated by the community at Herford: "For the promotion of our souls' salvation, as well as for the edification of our neighbor in the purity of the true Christian faith and the unity of our Mother the holy Christian Church, we will and intend to live a pure life, in harmony and community, by the work of our own hands, in true Christian religion and the service of God. We purpose to live a life of moderation, without beggary; to render obedience with reverence to our superiors; to wear a humble and simple habit; diligently to observe the canons of the holy Fathers, in so far as they are of profit; diligently to apply ourselves to the virtues and other holy exercises and studies; and not alone to live a blameless life, but to give a good pattern and example to other men."

The usual community of the Brethren consisted of twenty inmates of three classes: priests and candidates for the priesthood, laymen, and probationers for membership. The spiritual and ecclesiastical functions were naturally discharged by the first class. The lay brothers, who constituted most of the membership, carried on the various industries of the community. The period of probation was brief, varying from two months to a year. On entering the brotherhood, one might retain his property or dispose of it as he chose, but if he donated it to the house he could not recover it in case he left. Although one of the characteristics of the Brethren was their free intercourse with society, yet they had a simple uniform which distinguished them from their fellows. This was not strange since even the trade guilds had each its own regalia. The habit of the Brethren consisted of a simple outer garment of black or gray linen. In the case of the clerics it reached to the ground, for the laymen it was shorter. Their undergarments were also of rough linen. In cold weather a bluish-gray cloak with a black hood was worn.

The popular names given them in different places are suggestive of the esteem in which the Brethren were held. Where their schools were prominent they were called "School Brothers," or "Brothers of the Pen" from their devotion to transcription, or "Apostolic Brothers" from their imitation of the communistic example of the Apostles, or "Fratres Collationum" from the fact that they gave plain and familiar talks to the people rather than formal sermons. The name "Lollard" was sometimes given them by their enemies.

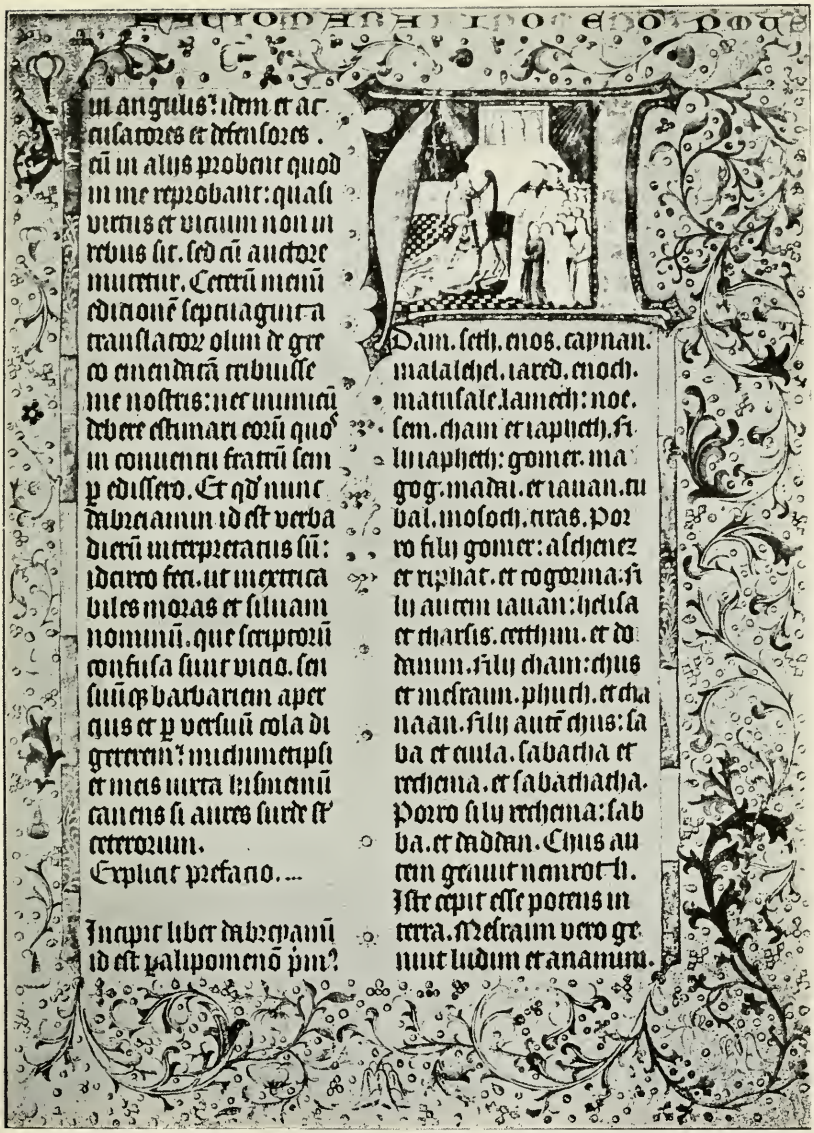
At the head of each house was a rector, chosen by the community, usually from its own membership. Each member pledged obedience to him and without his consent did not leave the house. Next in importance to the rector was the procurator who had charge of all the relations of the community to the outside world. A conspicuous officer was the librarian, whose work consisted not so much in the care of the books belonging to the house as in the supervision of the copying of the Scriptures and other religious books, which formed an important part of their industries. As in the case of the monastic orders there was a cellarer and a cook and a gardener and a nurse, and to assist them in their worship a sacristan and precentor. Each hour of the day had its appointed employment; in which the conduct of the school had an important place.

But the most distinctive feature of the brotherhood was its constant emphasis on what it called "modern devotion." There is in this term an implied contrast, doubtless, between the active life of the Brethren, in which study and work and conference were the chief means of developing the religious life, and the passive, dreamy devotions so characteristic of monasticism. It was believed that every task could be entered upon in the spirit of devotion and be made a means of communion with God and an aid to

the development of the spiritual life. While much was made of the monastic virtues of obedience and the conquest of pride and self-will and the disregard of worldly and temporal things, yet a due balance was maintained by great emphasis upon work and study and a knowledge of the Scriptures and a concern for the welfare of the outside world.

This combination of the active and the contemplative saved the Brethren from the excessive asceticism which marred the life even of that consummate flower of monasticism, Bernard of Clairvaux. Luxurious the life of the Brethren could never have been. Not being permitted to beg, they were shut off from a source of revenue which often rendered the mendicants rich; while their early rising, their long hours of work or study, their simple dress and food, all conspired to save them from the self-indulgence which had become the scandal of monasticism. On the other hand, there was nothing essentially ascetic in the principles of the order. Industry in study and work were cardinal virtues with which the crucifixion of the flesh seriously interfered. Although fasting and the wearing of a hair shirt were not absolutely prohibited, they were not encouraged, and to those whose health was endangered by them they were forbidden. But doubtless the chief deterrent from a reliance upon mechanical aids to sanctification was the constant emphasis placed upon the knowledge of the Scriptures as the foremost means of grace. The fresh hours of the morning were set aside to Bible study, and each day of the week had its appointed biblical theme as the subject of special meditation. And besides this, the Scriptures were always foremost among the manuscripts wrought upon with loving care in the quiet labors of the scriptorium.

Second only to the interest of the Brethren in the promotion of personal piety, and regarded as one of the



A Page from an Illuminated Copy of the Bible Made by the Brethren of the Common Life at Zwolle during the Lifetime of Wessel Gansfort

chief means thereto, was their activity in Christian education. This was manifest from the beginning. Nearly every community conducted a school. But where this was not feasible, the Brethren aided existing schools by providing them with teachers for certain classes, or by giving books to the scholars, or by offering board and lodging and employment to needy students, or by encouraging wealthy men to make provision for them. Some of their own schools were largely attended, as at Hertogenbosch where there were at one time over a thousand pupils; and everywhere they were active in promoting education. No doubt the course of instruction in their schools was somewhat one-sided, as is likely to be the case still in such institutions. It excluded much that we would regard as essential, and placed great emphasis upon the cultivation of religion. The character of the religious training given is indicated by this significant statement of Gerhard Groot: "Let the root of thy studies and the mirror of thy life be, first of all, the Gospel, for in it is contained the life of Christ; next the biographies and sayings of the Fathers; afterwards the Epistles of Paul and the Acts of the Apostles; and finally the devotional works of Bernard, Anselm, Augustine, and others." A course of religious instruction which was so centered about the person and teachings of our Lord and the life of the primitive Church could not but develop a practical and evangelical type of piety in the youthful pupil. The spirit of freedom in which this religious instruction was given may be inferred from an utterance of Groot, quoted by Thomas à Kempis, which appears to have been one of the maxims of the brotherhood. It is to the effect that "freedom of the mind is the chief blessing of the spiritual life."

It is difficult to estimate the influence of a movement like this, especially as from the first it comprised institutions for women and girls as well as for men and boys.

Its communities multiplied rapidly in the fifteenth century, and were not confined to the Netherlands but extended as far into Germany as Saxony. Everywhere they encouraged education, multiplied copies of the Scripture and other works of devotion and distributed them widely, trained the youth of both sexes in practical piety, preached a gospel of evangelical simplicity, and set a wholesome example of industry and unselfishness. And this they did under the impulse of a mystical piety sustained by study of the Bible and immediate communion with God.

The Brethren of the Common Life have been noticed thus at length for two reasons. In the first place, they afford the best illustration of certain non-ecclesiastical forces which in the fifteenth century were operating to improve the religious life of the Netherlands. The effort at reform in some of the monastic establishments offers another illustration. Together they were preparing the country for the Protestant Reformation of the next century. The general intelligence of the people, their possession of the Bible in their own language, and their acquaintance with a mystical type of religion somewhat independent of the Church had the double effect of saving the Humanism of the Netherlands from the skepticism to which it was everywhere exposed, and of predisposing the people to accept Protestant doctrine and withdraw from the Church of Rome. The Reformation movement in the Netherlands was to pass through three phases. It was first Anabaptist, then Lutheran, and finally Calvinistic. And the strength and persistence of the Anabaptists who represent the native type of Protestantism, popular and based upon a literal and naïve interpretation of the Scriptures, indicate how largely the common people had been leavened with the ideas for which the Brethren stood. And while the Anabaptists sometimes ran into fanaticism

and violence as at Münster, on the whole they came nearer reproducing primitive Christianity than did the maturer and sophisticated types of Protestantism. It was against them that nearly all the severe placards of Charles V were directed, and most of the early Dutch martyrs to the Protestant faith were drawn from their humble ranks.

But beside being a large factor in the religious life of the Netherlands in the fifteenth century, the Brethren exerted a direct influence in shaping the early career of the subject of our study. They not only assisted in forming his intellectual and religious environment, but they helped to form him. In Groningen, which was Wessel's birthplace, the Brethren had one of their most popular schools. It was here that his education began, and it was continued in the more famous school of the brotherhood at Zwolle. The training and the atmosphere of the schools conducted by the Brethren gave a decided bent to their pupils. It is by no accident that the three best-known religious writers of the Netherlands in this century, Thomas à Kempis, Wessel, and Erasmus, besides Alexander Hegius the greatest educational reformer of his age, and scores of men of lesser note, should have been under the instruction of the Brethren of the Common Life.

It is a notable fact that nearly all the movements toward the betterment of the Church and society during the Middle Ages took the form of monastic orders. The natural thing for a reformer to do was to found a brotherhood. But it is interesting to observe that when the Church undertook to reform herself in the fifteenth century, the monasteries themselves were found to be most in need of reformation. This was as true in the Netherlands as elsewhere. The picture which Erasmus paints of the stupidity and idleness and self-indulgence of the monks is more in the nature of a photograph than a caricature. Wessel and other earnest writers bring the same indict-

ments. And this does not mean that efforts were not being made to improve the condition of convent life. Gerhard Groot had also founded a model monastery at Windesheim near Zwolle. It was designed to set a new standard for monastic life, industrious, and scholarly, and strict in discipline. The response to this challenge is best shown in the fact that for the next two generations new monastic houses associated with Windesheim were built at the rate of one each year. It may have been this rapid growth of a rival brotherhood that stirred up the older orders represented in the Netherlands to an amendment of life. Determined efforts along this line were made by the Franciscans, the Benedictines, and the Cistercians; while a reform movement among the Dominicans, known as "the Holland Congregation," redeemed the reputation of that fraternity in the northern provinces. But by the fifteenth century monasticism was largely a spent force, and all these attempts at self-reform, even though reinforced by the assistance of a papal legate, as was sometimes the case, wrought only temporary improvement. Even the model houses of the Windesheim connection underwent deterioration after the second generation. The obscurantist attitude of the monks is illustrated by the fact that at the Council of Constance, it was they who attempted to secure official condemnation of the Brethren of the Common Life. Fortunately there were disciples of Gerhard Groot present to defend them.

Wessel has much to say in criticism of the Church of his day and doubtless his strictures are intended to apply primarily to the ecclesiastical situation in his native Netherlands where he spent most of his life. It is to be remembered that criticism of the Church in the fifteenth century did not imply disloyalty to her. Her most loyal sons were her severest critics. It was just as it is in Protestantism to-day. Those most interested in the welfare of the Church

are those most conscious of her defects and most insistent upon her betterment. The important difference between these fifteenth-century critics of the Church and the reformers of the next century lies in the fact that the former never dreamed of separation from the Mother Church while the latter ventured upon that course, when they found their reform measures stubbornly opposed by most of the Church's high officials. It is not fearless criticism of ecclesiastical abuses that constitutes Wessel a forerunner of Luther. That has been a common thing among loyal Catholics in every period of the Church's decadence and inefficiency. It is rather in his theological teachings and conception of ecclesiastical authority that he anticipated Luther.

And yet it is not improbable that as in Luther's case exasperation over what seemed to be the hopeless condition of the Church may have rendered him more radical in his theological opinions than he would otherwise have been. And there is abundant evidence of the maladministration of the Church in the Netherlands in the fifteenth century. This was doubtless due in part to the peculiar arrangement of the dioceses, an inheritance from an earlier period. The territories of the bishops did not correspond with those of the political provinces. The people of the Netherlands were beginning to have a sense of national unity; they felt that they belonged to one country. But the ecclesiastical divisions were still those made centuries before when their territory was simply a part of the Holy Roman Empire. They had no relation to the present provincial areas or the boundaries of Germany or France. Four German bishops ruled large areas in the northern part of the country, and six bishops, none of them belonging to the Netherlands, claimed each a part of one of the southern provinces. The situation was anomalous and made efficiency in administration well-nigh impossible.

Philip II brought about a redivision of the territory, the creation of new dioceses and archdioceses. This emancipated the Catholics of the Netherlands from the rule of foreign archbishops. As it was, every political movement was subject to complications from the fact that so much of the country owed spiritual allegiance to a foreign archbishop.

By far the most influential of the native bishops were those of Utrecht. Groningen was in the northeastern part of their domain. Wessel lived many years under their rule and counted one of them at least among his personal friends. These bishops were temporal princes with rich revenues and a feudal army. Their interests were mainly political or military, and their position was one coveted by the ambitious, and occupied often by men whose chief qualification for it was their subserviency to some secular prince or political party. The bishop not infrequently turned general, and led his army in the field. It may have been his example that encouraged some of the Dutch abbots to don armor and marshal their monks in battle. It was an age when almost everybody bore arms.

Of course, there were occasionally good bishops like John of Arkel, who a half century before the time of Wessel called synods, instituted many reforms, built churches and convents, founded libraries, and encouraged scholarship. Of a similar spirit was Frederick of Blankenheim whose long episcopate ended in 1423. He was described as "the father of the faithful and the friend of the pious." But that such a rôle was beset by many difficulties is indicated by his death-bed complaint "that everyone wished to rule and none to obey." When it came to the appointing of his successor the nobles and the chief cities of the diocese had one candidate and Pope Martin V another; and the papal candidate by means of liberal bribes secured the coveted position. The pro-

moters of his rival were not to be thwarted, and they also declared their candidate elected. So arose the disastrous schism of Utrecht which lasted a quarter of a century and involved the country in a most demoralizing conflict. Such was the situation in his home diocese during Wessel's youth and young manhood. And it cannot be said to have been much improved when later the Burgundian Duke Philip, in spite of the regular election of another and altogether suitable man, claimed the position for his bastard son, and made good his claim with abundant bribes and an army of invasion. It is not difficult to estimate the spiritual influence of such a bishop, even though a dispensation for his illegitimate birth was purchased from the pope. The administration of his high office was purely political. Fat benefices were given to the younger sons of influential noble families without much consideration for their fitness. Pluralities were permitted and important positions were bestowed upon minors. The traffic in indulgences was not interfered with, although it was meeting the criticism of men like Ruysbroek, who complained that money was being made "the penance and penalty for all sins." With ecclesiastical superiors appointed by political influence and living in luxury and sometimes in license, it was not strange that the lower clergy should neglect their duties and fall into loose ways. A modern Dutch historian has thus summarized the situation—quoting in part from an earlier writer: "There were many priests who 'fought like knights instead of teaching the gospel like clergy. They cared for themselves and their steeds, but tossed their books aside, and did not shame to load their fingers with rings. Dice, gaming, and reveling till late at night were their chosen occupations.' The extortions of which the pastors were guilty, the unchaste lives which they led with their concubines, the intoxication which had become habitual

among the clergy, their ignorance and their covetousness —all this is ample testimony that the Netherland clergy were not better than their contemporaries in their manner of life."

There can be no doubt that the demoralized condition of the Church in the Netherlands at this time was largely due to the political struggles through which the nation was passing. It was a period of social upheaval and intermittent civil war. As elsewhere in northern Europe the old feudal constitution of society was breaking up under the impact of forces that made for larger popular liberty and increased privileges for the industrial classes. The century-long strife between the Cods and the Hooks—resembling at so many points the conflict of parties in Italian cities—was at bottom a contest between the common people and their allies and the representatives of hereditary privilege. However disastrous the immediate results of this class-combat were, they must be accounted a part of the not-too-great price that the Dutch people paid for popular liberty.

But as has already been intimated, the political evolution of the Netherlands was interrupted by the territorial ambitions of the dukes of Burgundy. This duchy the French king gave to his youngest son, Philip, in 1363 as a reward for his brave protection of his father at the battle of Poitiers. The gift had altogether unexpected consequences, for the descendants of Philip were so to enlarge their territories and exalt their ambitions that they became rivals of the French kings and even of the emperors. The connection of these Burgundian dukes with the Netherlands began with the marriage of Philip to the countess of Flanders in 1384. This alliance ultimately gave the Burgundian duke large holdings in the southern provinces of the Netherlands and adjacent lands, as well as territories joining his dukedom both on the east and west. With the

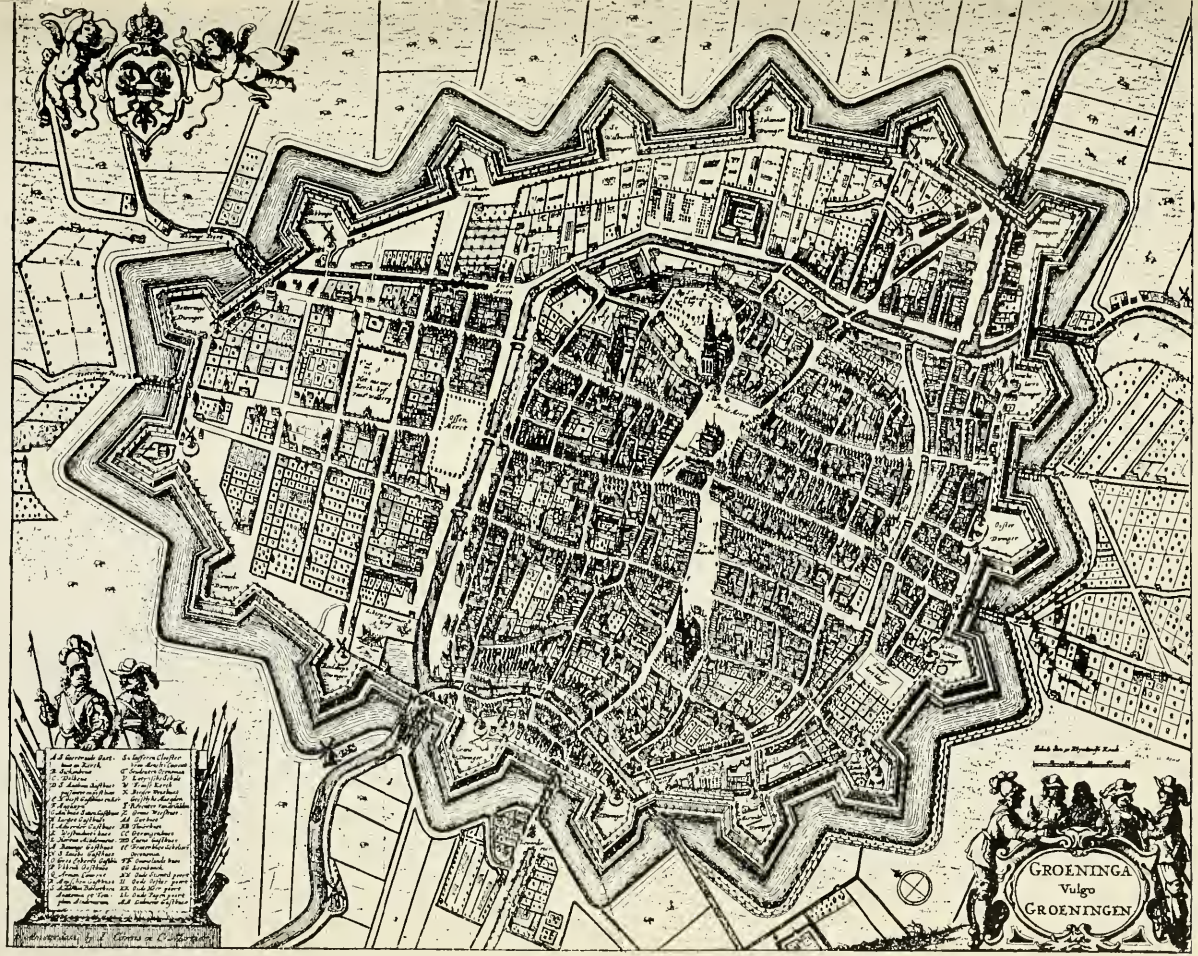
acquisition of these rich lands, which he held in feudal allegiance to the French king on the one hand and to the German emperor on the other, Philip began a policy of Burgundian aggression which his successors for nearly a century were to pursue with singular success. His grandson, who bears the misleading title Philip the Good, contrived to extend his authority over practically all of the Netherlands, and over many neighboring provinces. He was an independent king in everything but name, and formed alliances or engaged in war with the surrounding monarchs, as if he were their peer.

Philip began his rule in 1419, the year in which Wessel was born, and for nearly fifty years he directed the fortunes of the Netherlands, not so much in their own interests as in those of his soaring ambitions. Besides involving his Dutch subjects in wars with England and France in which they had no interest, he imposed new and heavy taxes upon them, often disregarded their hereditary liberties, and interfered with their commerce. Frequent revolts arose in consequence, and at one time or another Philip had occasion to appear with an army in almost every one of his Dutch provinces. Sometimes, as in the revolt of Ghent, he visited terrific vengeance upon his rebellious subjects.

The most beneficial effect of Burgundian rule in the Netherlands was its tendency to unify the diverse and sometimes mutually jealous provinces, and to give greater uniformity to their provincial governments. This was the result of the strong centralized authority of the dukes, and their successful resistance of the centrifugal tendency in the old feudal constitution of society. This hard pressure of external authority may have hastened the cohesion of the provinces into conscious national unity, even as the unwise assertion of authority by the English government in the matter of taxation and commerce developed in the

American colonies a new sense of their common interest. If this was the case, it was in the nature of a compensation for the interference of the Burgundians with the normal political and social evolution of their Dutch subjects. It is characteristic of the patient persistence of the Netherlanders that they should have seized upon every opportunity afforded by the financial straits or other embarrassments of their Burgundian rulers to exact from them, as the price of their grants of new money or soldiers, the restoration or extension of their liberties. And when in 1477 Burgundian dreams of empire came to such a sudden end in the defeat and death of Charles the Bold, the representatives of provinces that the dukes had often played off against one another met in the States General at Ghent and demanded a new charter that should restore and enlarge their ancient liberties. When this was granted they were ready with men and money to protect the young duchess, and drive back the French troops on the Flemish borders.

So far as it affects our subject such in barest outline was the condition of the Netherlands, during the fifteenth century. It was a period of intellectual and industrial activity and of prosperity in spite of civil strife and political contentions. The Church was badly administered, the monasteries had fallen into decline, but there were many wholesome influences, educational and religious, which combined to make such a life as that of Wessel Gansfort possible.



A Plan of Groningen Prior to the Removal of its Walls and Fortifications. In the Centre Appears the Compact Mediæval City

CHAPTER II

HIS REMOTER ENVIRONMENT

With the development of the universities in the latter part of the Middle Ages there appeared a new type of scholar. He was intellectually a cosmopolite. The horizon of the medieval man had been narrow and his interests largely provincial. Even his scholarship had been in a sense local. Until Abélard, there were no teachers or schools of international distinction. But the impulse which he gave to education and the awakening intellectual life of Europe resulted in the organization, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, of many institutions in whose teaching force or student body there were representatives of every Christian land. As there was but one language of instruction, teachers and students moved readily, even more freely than they do to-day, from one university to another. This movement from school to school, and this free intercourse between students from different regions resulted in the development of a broader scholarship, cosmopolitan in outlook. The later medieval scholar was, in intellectual sympathies, a citizen of the world. This was especially true of those early humanistic scholars of whom Wessel is representative. They were the product of no one land; and they did their work with the consciousness of what was being thought and done in other parts of the world.

Their world was Europe and those parts of Asia and Africa known to the ancients. But not least among the

great accomplishments of the fifteenth century was the sudden expansion of this narrow world. It was the Age of Discovery. Two continents, Africa and America, were added to the map. After more than a half century of gradual approach Portuguese explorers in 1486 reached and passed the Cape of Good Hope. The progress of their exploration had been followed with the keenest interest in every educated circle in Europe. Upon their fortunate culmination, the foremost Humanist of Italy, Politian of Florence, congratulated the Portuguese king upon having restored a continent to the knowledge of mankind, and upon having become the guardian of a second world, "Mundus Alter."

These explorations on the African coast had revived interest everywhere in the possibility of reaching India by a western course. The more adventurous sailors of every maritime nation were dreaming of it, encouraged by their ambitious monarchs. Columbus was only one—the most logical and determined and fortunate—of a group of brave explorers whose eyes were fixed upon the western horizon. America, in any case, could not have much longer remained hidden from the knowledge of expectant Europe.

It is significant that almost contemporaneously with this broadening of the geographical horizon of all educated men, there occurred also the expansion of their universe. Cardinal Cusa, who was nearly two decades older than Wessel, ventured the opinion that the earth revolved; and Copernicus, who was nearly a half century younger, gave wide currency to this view and to the others that constitute his system. But it proved much easier for men to admit new continents to their thought than to shift the theoretic center of things from the earth to the sun. That proved too difficult even for Luther, who said that it was forbidden both by Scripture and common sense!

But more influential than the appearance of a new cosmic theory or the emergence of new continents, in shaping the thought of the fifteenth century, was the gradual discovery of the Ancient World, the classic civilization. This gave everything in life a new perspective, and presented it with a new criterion.

Two conceptions had dominated the thought of the Middle Ages: that of a Universal Church, and that of a Universal Empire. These were the divinely appointed institutions within which a man must establish his temporal and spiritual relationships. Outside these were barbarism, and political chaos, and perdition. Augustine had given currency to the idea that the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church had been ordained of God as his permanent agencies for the government and the salvation of men; and it had become the fundamental hypothesis that underlay all the political and religious thinking of the Middle Ages.

It did not seriously disturb the scholastic theorists that the Holy Roman Empire no longer contained all the Christian states of Europe, and that the entire oriental half of Christendom refused allegiance to the head of the Holy Roman Church. These were merely infelicitous facts, to which the time-honored theory was not expected to yield. Deliverance from the intellectual and spiritual tryanny imposed by this obsolete hypothesis was to arise from another quarter. Conceptions that had withstood the contradiction of obvious present facts yielded to a denial from the remote past. The Renaissance was coincident with the recovered knowledge of the literature and art of classic Greece and Rome. Men who had been taught to believe that everything that was worthy in human life depended upon one's relation to the Holy Roman Church and Empire discovered that centuries before the existence of the Church or the Empire men had

wrought most noble achievements in character and government and philosophy and literature and art. These men of the classic age were seen to have enjoyed a freedom of speculation, a love of beauty, and a simple joy in life, that the medieval man, hemmed in by the restraints of the Church and haunted by its supernaturalism, could not but regard with impatient envy. The classic sages and seers and heroes, the nobler emperors and Plutarch's men, these presented types of full-rounded manhood, in comparison with which his saints and martyrs seemed one-sided and dwarfed in development. It was thus through acquaintance with the remote past that the medieval scholar came to realize that his fundamental assumptions sorely needed revision.

The approach to this New Learning concerning the old world was through the classic literature of Greece and Rome. Petrarch and Boccaccio in the fourteenth century were pioneers in this field. In the next century it had enthusiastic explorers among the ablest students in every land in western Europe. The natural extension of the movement was accelerated somewhat by the coming of Greek scholars, with their priceless manuscripts, from the eastern lands which were being overrun by the Turk.

The immediate effect of this new interest in the literatures of Greece and Rome was to divert attention somewhat from scholastic theology in all the schools in which it gained a place. The study of these classic languages became a passion, and the imitation of the style of classic authors an academic fad. It was not strange if university students neglected the Church Fathers to read Horace or Juvenal, or felt the lack of charm in the writings of the theologians after reading the polished periods of Cicero. But the secondary effects of Humanistic studies were far more serious, and led to their exclusion by some institutions. In Italy especially, the Renaissance tended to

lessen allegiance to the Church and substitute pagan for Christian morals. This was noticeable even in high ecclesiastical circles. A new point of view and acquaintance with the free speculation of the ancient philosophers made some humanistic scholars impatient with the Church's rigid dogmatic system. These influences caused many to look with apprehension upon the growing popularity of the New Learning. But in the main their fears proved ungrounded. Whatever may have been its first effects in Italy, the final results of the movement in the Church at large were unquestionably beneficial. Besides affording them a truer perspective on life and a greater freedom of thought, it trained the scholars of the Church in a historical method of approach and gave them a linguistic equipment which opened to them the treasures of the New Testament and the patristic literature, and so prepared the way for the Reformation.

Humanism had its birth in Italy and gradually made its way northward. Its greatest representative from the Netherlands was Erasmus; but a generation before him, Wessel afforded a notable example of the way in which the New Learning could be made contributary to Christian theology and ethics. In any exact classification, Wessel is to be thought of as a Humanist quite as much as a Reformer, for Humanism formed the dominant intellectual influence of his century. It had early possessed distinguished teachers in the schools of the Brethren of the Common Life, and Wessel came under its influence in his youth and gave much of his manhood to its extension.

A glance at the political history of Europe in the fifteenth century affords an illustration of the desperate conflicts which were incident to the development of modern national life. It was a time of war and rumors of war, of rapidly changing boundaries, and the emergence of new political forces. Wessel, like the other great scholars

of his day, was in a certain sense a man of the world. He traveled widely, and lived for a time in Paris and in Rome, vortices of the world's political life. He was not an example of cloistered scholarship, and could not have been uninfluenced by the stirring events occurring about him. They doubtless contributed to shape his thought and determine his convictions, especially on such subjects as the Divine Providence, on which he wrote a treatise.

Probably the most significant movement in the political life of Europe during his time was the invasion by the Ottoman Turks. Begun the century before, it swept forward irresistibly, overwhelming what we now call the Balkan States, taking possession of Constantinople, and threatening the Empire itself. To resist this incursion of an alien race and a hostile faith church councils were held and crusades announced. The monarchs of western Europe were appealed to by the Byzantine Christians. But all to no avail. The Turkish conquerors added one province to another till they became a great European power with a territory larger than that of France, and with plans of further conquest which terrified many a Christian state. Yet no Charles Martel arose to turn back the tide of invasion. It was, however, during this century that Spain, by the conquest of Granada, removed the last reminder of an earlier Moslem invasion of Europe.

During the fifteenth century the Empire was in point of political development the most backward nation of western Europe. While the countries about it were making progress toward true national life and centralized government, it still retained its feudal constitution. Its lack of unification and the mutual jealousy of its constituent kingdoms and provinces made it ineffective in diplomacy or war. Its emperor was no longer regarded as the divinely appointed ruler of all Christendom, but simply as a German sovereign. The century opened with the deposition of Wenceslaus of

the House of Luxemburg. His brother Sigismund, who, after an interval, followed him upon the throne, was the last of this house to win imperial honors. Their reigns were disturbed and their Bohemian territories distracted by the long Hussite Wars. It was Sigismund who called the Council of Constance, and violated his safe-conduct for John Huss. In 1440 he was succeeded upon the imperial throne by Frederick III of the House of Hapsburg, who reigned until nearly the end of the century. Frederick possessed and deserved little authority over his fellow princes, for he neglected the interests of the Empire to advance those of his own personal domain and left the protection of Europe from Turkish aggression to the Hungarians and the Poles.

The Italian peninsula was theoretically a part of the Empire, but actually independent. It consisted of five states, the duchy of Milan, the republics of Venice and Florence, the principality of the pope, and the kingdom of Naples. Italian unity was as yet merely the dream of idealists. Each state had its own interests and ambitions. Yet here the Renaissance had its birth and popular liberty its early successful experiments, while the larger cities had reached an industrial development and a degree of refinement and elegance unattained as yet in northern Europe. In Florence, civic and religious reform had an eloquent but unfortunate champion in Savonarola. The predominant interest in Italy, however, was commercial and intellectual rather than religious. This fact must have been apparent to Wessel during his residence in Rome about 1470.

Political interest in the fifteenth century centers in the relations of France and England, whose Hundred Years' War did not end till 1453. Large areas in France were devastated by this long contest, and the industrial development of the country was brought to a standstill. While

the honors of war were largely with the invading English armies, yet the tide of fortune turned with the romantic career of Joan of Arc, and at the conclusion of peace, England had lost practically all her possessions in France. This was a fortunate settlement, for it left each country free to develop its distinct national life. France at once entered upon a period of great material improvement, and in spite of the ambitious aims of Burgundy, extended her territory, and centralized her government in the person of her king, who instead of being merely the foremost peer of the realm became a true monarch.

England was less fortunate, for the contest between two royal families for the possession of the crown, which we call the Wars of the Roses, began as soon as the conflict with France ceased and lasted a whole generation. But in compensation for the material injuries entailed by this long civil war, and partly as a result of its destruction of so many noble families, the monarchs of the new Tudor dynasty which came into power in 1485 were to give England a strong, if somewhat despotic, government, and provide the conditions for her industrial and commercial development.

In Spain also there was manifest the same movement toward centralization in government and a unified national life. Under Ferdinand and Isabella Castile and Aragon were united and both grandees and clergy brought into subserviency to the crown. Their conquest of Granada at the end of the century gave to Spain the boundaries which she has to-day, and prepared the way for her great future influence in European politics.

It is noteworthy that the rise of monarchy was attended by evidences of industrial and political discontent among the common people, who dreamed of representative government and larger popular liberties. There was developing almost everywhere a feeling of resentment

against the old feudal principle of personal privilege. While the writings of Wessel make few references to the political occurrences of his times, yet he could not have been insensible to the trend of events, and his pronounced individualism in religious matters shows his intellectual sympathy with movements among his own people in resistance to arbitrary political authority. In fact he expresses political sentiments of a most democratic character. He had no more disposition to admit the divine right of kings than the divine authority of the pope.

If we speak of the sixteenth century as that of the Reformation, we may well characterize the fifteenth as that of attempted reform. The attempts were of two sorts: those made by the officials of the Church and formally adopted as a part of her policy; and those made by individuals, and unauthorized or opposed by the authorities of the Church. They may be noticed in this order.

The humiliation of the papacy due to its seventy years' residence, under French domination, at Avignon was almost immediately followed by an even greater abasement of the papal dignity. This was the great Western Schism which for forty years divided the Christian Church in Europe into two hostile camps. It began in 1378, when the cardinals found themselves unable to endure the arbitrary rule of Urban VI, and ventured to seek relief by the election of a rival pope in the person of Clement VII. He was well suited to lead an insurrection, for although a cardinal and connected by birth with many royal houses, he was by profession a soldier and had figured more on battle-fields and in massacres than at the papal court. The two rival popes, each supported by cardinals, first heartily anathematized each other, and then set about dividing the Church territory and emoluments between them. The nations took sides according

to their political sympathies, and there began a period of bitter strife, of relaxed discipline, and general demoralization in the life of the Church.

It was the purpose of the Reforming Councils to reunite the Church and correct the abuses which had become most flagrant during the rule of the rival popes. The first was called by a group of the better disposed cardinals representing both parties. It met at Pisa in 1409, and proved to be fairly representative of the Church. It deposed both popes and elected another in their place; but the reforms which many were urging, the new pope postponed for the consideration of another council which he promised to call in three years. As the deposed popes declined to withdraw there were now three claimants to the papal chair, and the new pope who died within a year was succeeded by John XXIII, of most unsavory reputation. The situation being now worse than before, a second Reforming Council was called by Emperor Sigismund and the pope. It met at Constance in 1414. In dealing with the papal succession it was more successful than that of Pisa, but it failed to address itself effectively to the reforms for which the better elements in the Council, lay and clerical, were making demand. The newly elected pope opposed reformatory legislation and sought to appease the reformers by vague promises and unimportant concessions. This Council challenges interest from many considerations. It tried for heresy and condemned to the flames John Huss and Jerome of Prague. It affirmed that a lawfully assembled Ecumenical Council, such as it declared itself to be, has its authority immediately from Christ and must be obeyed by all Christians, even the pope himself. It committed itself to the statement that the Church was in crying need of reformation "in its head and members," and it made provision that a General Council should thereafter meet every ten years.

Sixteen years elapsed before the pope, in response to a general demand for it, convened the third Reforming Council at Basel. In the meantime he had somewhat restored the lost prestige of his high office, though papal extortion had in no wise abated. The Council reaffirmed its supreme authority and did not hesitate to legislate for the pope. It came to an agreement with the followers of Huss, who had been in rebellion against their king and the Church, and it passed measures calculated to correct such papal abuses as reservations and annates and the reckless use of the interdict. A session of the Council was held at Florence in 1438 to meet the representatives of the Eastern Church, who were seeking the assistance of Western Christendom in resistance to Turkish invasion. The Greek ecclesiastics came as suppliants, and they were required to concede most of the points at issue between them and the Western Church as the basis of a reunion of Christendom, and the price of military assistance. But their humiliating concessions were made in vain, for the pope's subjects were indifferent to the fate of Constantinople, and the Greek Church promptly repudiated the action of its delegates. Though the Council maintained a nominal existence till 1449 it accomplished comparatively little in the way of radical reform.

However unsuccessful these Councils may have been, they established an important precedent. The Church now had a resource in case the abuse of papal power became intolerable. The threat of a General Council had a wholesome effect upon the popes. Advocates of reform hoped that it might be again convened; and, later, Luther appealed from the verdict of the pope and the Diet to the decision of a General Council. But a whole century was to elapse, and the Protestant Reformation pass through its first stage, before the next Reforming Council, that of Trent, was called.

There can be no doubt that Wessel was much influenced, as every other thoughtful man must have been, by the action of these Councils. They had repeatedly affirmed the Church's crying need of sweeping reforms, and they had asserted and acted upon the principle that the consensus of the Church's representatives, and not the dictum of the pope, constituted the Christian's final authority. The frequency of Wessel's allusions to John Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris and promoter of the Councils at Pisa and Constance, shows the deep interest that he had taken in these attempts of the Church to reform herself. The Council of Basel was still in session when he became a student in the University at Cologne.

Even more influential in shaping the future of the Church were the unofficial efforts being made at her reformation. The Councils sought to reform the Church's organization and administration, these other attempts were directed toward her doctrines as well. They were based, not so much on theories as to the proper constitution of the Church, or consciousness of the corruption in the Church's administration, as upon a knowledge of the New Testament and the contrast between its teachings and the dogmas of the Church. The pioneer in this reformation of the Church on the basis of the Scriptures was Wyclif, whose remarkable career came to a peaceful end in 1384. In all important particulars he anticipated the reformatory doctrines of Luther, but with a radicalism, and disregard for precedent to which the Wittenberg reformer was a stranger. His chief confidence for the permanence of the movement that he led rested in his translation of the Scriptures into the language of the common people. And in this he was not to be disappointed. For though his followers met severe persecution and were outlawed by the government, yet they escaped extermination; and the movement lived a kind of subterranean

life till the sixteenth century. But it was in Bohemia that Wyclif's teachings were to bear their fullest harvest. John Huss and Jerome of Prague, ardent disciples of his, found their countrymen quite prepared to accept his evangelical doctrines and radical reforms. Though they were condemned to death by the Council of Constance as heretics, yet that fact and the pope's command that the Bohemian heresy be suppressed by whatever means might be necessary only added fuel to the fire. The movement spread with great rapidity, and took on the character of a national revolt. It met persecution with armed resistance, successfully defied the Emperor, and secured from the Council of Basel important concessions. After making their peace with the Church the Bohemian reformers ceased to be actively aggressive, but they remained a party in the Church during the lifetime of Wessel, and blended with the reformation movement of the next century.

Besides these attempts at Church reform in England and Bohemia, less conspicuous agencies were at work elsewhere. It is impossible to estimate the extent to which the influence of the Waldenses and kindred movements may have penetrated the industrial classes of the northern cities, but it, no less than the mysticism of the Rhine country, contributed to the popular demand for betterment in the life of the Church. Among the more educated classes the well-known writings of such scholars as Marsilius, Clémanges, Gerson, d'Ailly, Ullerston, and others who boldly criticized the administration of the Church, had awakened a sense of her dire need of thorough amendment, while the authority of the pope and his right to temporal possessions were being assailed from many directions.

Thus it is apparent that Wessel, in criticizing the pope and the Church, stood in a long succession of notable men, and gave expression also to widespread popular sentiment.

Yet it must be admitted that the increased power of the papacy after the Council of Basel, and the abler administration of papal politics, afforded less encouragement to popular expectation of the needed reforms in the Church. The mature life of Wessel spans six pontificates; one of the popes was his personal friend. With the main features of the character and policy of them all he must have been somewhat familiar. Upon his knowledge of them he formed his conception of the papacy. Nicholas V, whose pontificate began during the Council of Basel, did much to restore the prestige of the papacy. He was a man of estimable character and fine scholarship, the first Humanist to occupy the papal chair. He was a patron of learning and of architecture, a collector of manuscripts and the founder of the Vatican Library. For the protection of himself and future popes he built fortresses in Rome and elsewhere in the papal states. His relations in Italy were far from peaceful, and most of his political ventures, such as the advocacy of a crusade in defense of Constantinople, brought him little satisfaction. The most successful incidents of his pontificate were the Jubilee of the year 1450 when pilgrims from all Christendom flocked to Rome in tens of thousands with gifts that filled the papal treasury, and his coronation of Emperor Frederick III in 1452, when it seemed for the moment that the ancient splendor of the Church and the Empire had been restored. But Nicholas never ventured to attempt any of the promised reforms in the administration of the Church and he lived in dread of another General Council.

The brief pontificate of Calixtus III was chiefly occupied with a vain attempt to summon Europe to the repression of Turkish invasion. The pope's own ill-considered expeditions came to nothing. He neglected all the nobler undertakings begun by his predecessor, and was chiefly concerned to place his unworthy relatives in

the highest positions in the Church. The pope who took the title Pius II had long been a conspicuous figure in the diplomatic world. He was a Humanist of lax morals, a typical literary fortune-hunter. In the Council of Basel his eloquence had been directed against the claims of the pope, but his elevation to the papal chair wrought a complete change in his attitude alike toward Humanism and reform and the claims of the papacy. Though he had committed himself to the organization of a crusade against the Turks, he postponed it till the approach of his death insured its failure, while he devoted his great talents to the conquest of the papal states, the aggrandizement of his family, and the increase of papal authority. In accomplishing the latter he had to retreat from his earlier position as the champion of the supreme authority of a General Council, and an advocate of drastic reform.

With Paul II, a nephew of Pius II, the tide in the papal fortunes turned; the priestly character of the popes began to be absorbed in that of territorial lords. This trend became more noticeable in the pontificate of his successor. Paul II was a man of character and culture, a patron of architecture and an art collector, but he had no sympathy with the Humanists, and made his displeasure felt by the Roman Academy, which showed a strong atheistical bent. The cardinals whom he created were all able men, though, following the vicious custom of his day, he chose three of them from among his nephews. His one great venture, the restoration of Bohemia to Catholic uniformity, involved eastern Europe in a fruitless war, and prepared the way for further Turkish aggression. He attempted none of the reforms which the Councils had advocated.

The last pope who could have influenced Wessel's attitude toward the papacy was his friend, who in 1471 ascended the papal throne with the title Sixtus IV. Wessel was living at Rome at the time, and had attained some

distinction there as a scholar. It is quite in accord with the policy of Sixtus that he should have asked his friend to name some ecclesiastical position that he might desire to occupy. Sixtus had by sheer ability and ambition risen from utter obscurity to the position of General of the Franciscan Order, University Lecturer on Theology, and finally Cardinal. He was fifty-seven years old when elected pope, and his rule of thirteen years left a permanent impression on the character of the papacy. He afforded another illustration of the fact that the blameless personal life of a pope is no assurance against a vicious and demoralizing papal policy. Sixtus had been an exemplary Franciscan theologian and a reformer of monasteries, but as pope his one concern was to figure as a temporal prince and make the papacy the leading political power of Italy. To accomplish this worldly end he heartily adopted worldly means of the most questionable sort. With an upstart's passion to give power and distinction to his family, he was reckless in his nepotism. Eight of his relatives were made cardinals, and many others were enriched at the expense of the Church, or enabled to make matrimonial alliance with princely houses. Naturally, these relatives were his ready agents in carrying out his political schemes. The lavish splendor in which some of them lived became a scandal even in Rome. His political ambitions involved him in disastrous wars with the other leading powers in Italy, in diplomatic intrigues, and in assassinations. In thus maintaining the character of an ambitious prince, the pope forfeited what remained of his prestige as the Spiritual Father of Christendom. He ceased to offer any effective resistance to the corrupt influences of the age. The papacy became secularized, its religious functions were largely formal and perfunctory. It was this secularization of the papacy, completed by Sixtus' successors, that alienated from it the nations of

northern Europe and opened the way for the Protestant revolt. In spite of his character as an unscrupulous politician, Sixtus was a patron of literature and art, and Rome still bears the marks of his architectural enterprise and taste. The Sistine Chapel constitutes the best-known monument to his æsthetic interest.

Wessel had left Rome soon after the election of his friend, and it is easy to conceive his disappointment in the papal policy of one from whom he and the world might well have expected better things. During his pontificate all advocates of reform in the Church or society saw their hopes deferred.

As has been already intimated, Humanism was the distinctive intellectual movement of the fifteenth century. Its transplantation from Italy to the Germanic lands was a slow process, and was still in progress when the Reformation broke out. Its propagators were polished Italian diplomats like Æneas Sylvius, scholastic adventurers like Peter Luder who had studied or at least traveled in Italy, later Italian and Greek scholars seeking employment in northern lands, and finally earnest students who went to Italy with the intention of bringing the New Learning back to the Fatherland. Of these last Agricola is an early representative. Born near Groningen, almost a generation after Wessel, he studied in the northern universities of Erfurt, Louvain, and Cologne, and then traveled in Italy and spent some time at the universities of Pavia and Ferrara. Upon his return, he became attached to the court of the Elector Philip at Heidelberg, in whose university and also at Worms he lectured on Greek and Latin literature. A pupil of his in the humanities was Hegius, who gave such distinction to the school of the Brethren of the Common Life at Deventer that its attendance reached two thousand. Through the labors of such men, there grew up in Germany in the latter half of

the century such a popular desire for instruction in the classic languages that lectureships on the subject were established in many of its leading schools. The attractive power of such courses soon became recognized.

But it must not be supposed that the New Learning at once diverted interest from the scholastic contentions with which the students of philosophy and theology had long been accustomed to sharpen their wits. These still constituted the *pièce de résistance* in the intellectual pabulum provided the ambitious student. The diverse modes of thinking represented by the Greek sages Plato and Aristotle had been applied to Christian doctrine and had resulted in the development of two antagonistic schools of Christian thought represented by Realism and Nominalism. The contest between them had grown the more bitter because of the championship of them by different institutions and rival monastic orders. It had long engrossed, and in a sense sterilized, the intellectual life of many of the schools. How absorbing this contention was may be inferred from the fact that even a man like Wessel, coming from such an atmosphere as that of the school at Zwolle, and preoccupied with biblical studies, should have been drawn into it at Cologne, and should have gone to Paris as a champion of Realism. It has been said that the Renaissance rediscovered man and the earth, both of which the Schoolmen had forgotten in their absorption in philosophical abstractions.

No doubt the greatest stimulus to the intellectual life of the fifteenth century was the invention of printing and the improvement of its necessary concomitant, linen and cotton paper. Though the dilettante Humanist might continue to prefer his parchment manuscript to the mechanically produced book, yet the comparative cheapness of the latter made it an inestimable boon to the ordinary student. The first product of the press of Guten-

The Fish Market, Groningen. The Church of St. Martin in the Background

berg was a complete Latin Bible issued about 1455. In a few decades printing presses were in operation in almost every country of Europe, and the way was prepared for a wide and swift dissemination of new ideas.

There was much freedom of religious thought in the fifteenth century. The papacy was disorganized for long periods. The Great Schism and the Reforming Councils had broken the spell of papal authority and had afforded the leading scholars of the Church opportunity to debate questions of doctrine and polity in great free assemblages whose transactions were everywhere the subject of comment. Freedom of debate develops freedom of thought, and the revival of the long-neglected Ecumenical Council with its opportunity of free discussion promised much for the emancipation of the intellectual life of the Church. In the sixteenth century, sharp doctrinal contests between two rather clearly defined parties and the consequent threat of disruption in the Church developed a persecuting intolerance in the Roman authorities which soon found its counterpart in Protestantism. But during the fifteenth century there was a more tolerant spirit abroad and men who held views quite divergent from current orthodoxy might, like Wessel, find protection even under the papal ægis. The extensive compromises that some members of the Council at Basel were willing to make with the Hussites is a good illustration of this fact.

Surprise has been expressed that a man holding such views as did Wessel should have been relatively free from persecution and should have ended his days peacefully in the bosom of the Church. But there were many in his century, some of them in high ecclesiastical position, who made no secret of their dissent from the dogmas of the Church. Of this fact Nicholas of Cusa, a contemporary of Wessel, affords a striking example. He was from the Rhine region, and received his early education from the Brethren

of the Common Life at Deventer. Later in different schools he studied mathematics and astronomy as well as Greek and Hebrew and philosophy. Because of his extraordinary talents he made rapid ascent of the ecclesiastical ladder and before he was fifty had become cardinal and archbishop. He was a humanistic scholar, a mystic, a bold speculator in philosophy. Bruno claimed him as his master and students of the history of philosophy have found in his writings anticipations of certain views of Kant and Hegel. But most remarkable of all was his advocacy of the doctrine of the essential unity of all religious faiths. In 1453, about the time that Wessel went to Paris, he published a booklet entitled *The Harmony of Religions*, in which he contends that diversity in religious thought and worship is the inevitable result of human freedom and is not incompatible with a deeper unity, which it is the function of the true prophet to discover, so that all intolerance and persecution may cease. It reads like the brochure of some modern promoter of a Congress of Religions. Yet Nicholas was not disturbed; he enjoyed the intimate friendship of the pope, and was his trusted representative on many important occasions. Wessel himself was to discover in Rome a circle of ecclesiastics very near to the papal throne in which there was much ill-concealed dissent from current orthodoxy, if not tacit unbelief. It was an age in which many bold spirits were breaking the shackles of traditional thought.

CHAPTER III

HIS YOUTH

THE life of John Wessel was preëminently that of a scholar. The interest that he has excited has been due, not to any dramatic episodes in his career, or any distinguished public services that he rendered, but solely to his contribution to the religious thought of his age. Although his was not the cloistered scholarship that depends upon the publisher for its influence, yet it cannot be said that his contacts with his contemporaries were such as to excite popular notice. He was a man of the schools, a teacher, a writer, a traveler in search of knowledge. There is little in the external aspects of his career to distinguish him from the typical medieval schoolman, the wandering devotee to learning, the errant champion of ideas in the university tourneys.

Those who were concerned for the preservation of Wessel's writings apparently made no effort to preserve a detailed record of the occurrences of his life. His most devoted disciples kept no Memorabilia of their honored teacher. There is no strictly contemporary biography, or even biographical sketch of him. The brief life by Albert Hardenberg, prefixed to the Groningen edition of Wessel's writings, is the work of one who knew many of his pupils and friends, and had access to data concerning him now unfortunately lost. To him and to the few remaining letters of Wessel, and also to incidental references to him in the writings of his contemporaries, we owe all that we

know of a certainty concerning this scholar so famous in his own generation. In the century following his death there grew up, in the region in which he had spent most of his life, a mass of traditions concerning him, from which his more careful biographers have drawn with justifiable caution. From the reliable material at hand, we can construct nothing more satisfactory than a bare outline of Wessel's life, though we may venture to fill in the outline somewhat with data of less certain accuracy.

John Wessel was born at Groningen about the year 1420. His birthplace is still shown in Heerestraat, and may be identified by the family coat-of-arms set in the outer wall. Groningen was then one of the leading towns in the northern Netherlands, and had given its name to an important province. It is still a thriving city, with a notable university in which Professor Blok, the best known recent historian of the Netherlands, once taught.

Wessel's relation in point of time to the Protestant Reformation is suggested by the fact that his birth occurred thirty-five years after the death of Wyclif and five years after the martyrdom of Huss. Peter d'Ailly died that year and John Gerson nine years later, while Erasmus and Colet were not to appear till nearly a half century later, and Luther and Zwingli twenty years later still.

Beside the name by which he is usually known, John Wessel, he was sometimes given his father's name, Herman, also, according to the custom of the times. He likewise bore the name Gansfort, or as it is in its Dutch form, Goesevort. The origin of this word has been the subject of much dispute. But there seems now little reason to doubt that it was not a personal but a family name, derived from a village in Westphalia, from which the Wessels had originally come. There are families in America bearing the name in its anglicized form of Ganse-voort. It was one of the affectations of the Humanists to

latinize or hellenize their own names and those of their friends. Thus the Italian literary adventurer who became Pope Pius II had called himself Æneas Sylvius, and Philip Schwarzerd is known to us by the more euphonious name of Melanchthon. Apparently the friends of Wessel had sought some Greek equivalent for his name, and had found its nearest approach in that of the patristic scholar, Basilius. And by this name he is referred to by some of his friends.

It was a custom among the Schoolmen for students to give extravagant titles to their teachers. Thomas Aquinas was called "Doctor Angelicus," Bonaventura, "Doctor Seraphicus," and Peter Lombard, "The Master of Sentences." Wessel was given two such titles. By his admirers he was called "Light of the World," while his adversaries dubbed him, "Master of Contradiction." The former title was a tribute to his learning and perhaps also to his extraordinary gift of illuminating discourse; the latter was intended as a reproach, in view of his ready opposition to current opinion and his love of paradox. It is needless to say that the former alone appears in his epitaph.

Wessel's parents were people of standing in Groningen, as may be inferred from their home and coat-of-arms, as well as from the fact that his mother came of the family of Clantes, later very prominent in the affairs of the city. Both his parents died while he was still a child, and he was taken into the home of a wealthy relative, named Ottilia Clantes, a woman conspicuous for her many virtues, who had him educated with her son. The boys first attended the school of the Brethren of the Common Life in Groningen, where from the very outset Wessel displayed singular industry and mental alertness. Very soon, however, they were transferred to the better school of the Brethren at Zwolle, fifty miles to the south.

This was one of the two original communities founded by Gerhard Groot, and was at the time distinguished for the thoroughness of its instruction and the number of its students. The curriculum of the school was undeniably narrow, even when judged by the standards of the times. Attention was concentrated upon the study of the Latin language and the principles of the Christian religion as set forth in the Scriptures and the Fathers. There was also some instruction in what Wessel's earliest biographer calls "the rudiments of the arts." Although Zwolle a few decades later was to send out some notable Humanists, at this time it evidently was untouched by the influence of the New Learning and contributed nothing to Wessel's later interest therein.

The impression made upon him by this school, in which he was what we would call a boarding-pupil, was deep and permanent. He was taught a simple fervid piety, and was led to a love and familiarity with the Scriptures which was to color all his later theological thinking. The life of the school community was simple and wholesome, and was pervaded by a spirit of brotherliness and industry. That Wessel made good use of his advantages and won the confidence of the officers of the school is evident from the fact that during the latter part of his stay he was appointed instructor of one of the lower classes. His success as a student was achieved in spite of—or perhaps partly because of—serious bodily infirmities. His eyes were not strong, and he had a twisted ankle that caused him to walk with a limp. It has been suggested by one of his biographers that these physical defects may have contributed "to give an introverted direction to his mind, and to confirm the strength and independence of his character in opposition to the world without."

Nothing is known concerning Wessel's teachers at Zwolle; but he there came under the influence of one man

whom we count among the Immortals. It was none other than Thomas à Kempis, to whom is generally attributed the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ.* Thomas had himself been brought up in a school of the Brethren at Deventer; he had deeply imbibed their principles of devotion, and had become skilled in the transcription of the Bible and other books of religion. Later he had entered the Augustinian monastery at Mount Saint Agnes, where he took priestly orders, and was made canon. He had come to distinction as a writer and as a man of unusual wisdom and piety, and his counsel was much sought by young men outside his order. It was not strange that a serious youth such as Wessel should have sought the acquaintance and instruction of Thomas, especially as his monastery was less than two miles from Zwolle, and that something like friendship should have grown up between this saint of sixty years and this eager student of twenty. Such friendships have been among the most fruitful agencies in the transmission of intellectual and spiritual energy from one generation to another. For to the zeal of the teacher there is added the tender interest of the father, while a filial reverence and affection render the pupil doubly receptive and loyal. The relation between Paul and Timothy has found repetition times innumerable and between some of the rarest spirits in the history of the Church.

It would appear that at this time Thomas had just completed or was engaged in writing *The Imitation of Christ.* The reading of the book made a deep impression upon Wessel. He later declared that it gave him his first strong impulse toward piety and also afforded him the basis of a true theology. As a consequence of his intimacy with Thomas, he came to think seriously of following his master into the monastic life. But he did not take the decisive step. Not even his devotion to his revered

counselor could overcome his innate reluctance to enter a life whose fundamental virtues were obedience to a superior and exact conformity to minute regulations. He was by nature too independent, too self-reliant to be suited to a life under inflexible rules. And besides this, his mind revolted from the superstitions of the monks, and their mental inertia. He must be free, and he must have opportunity for unrestricted study. The contemplative life had afforded Thomas favorable conditions for calm meditation on the highest themes, for the study of the Bible and a few other books, for his beloved labors as a copyist, and for the composition of his devotional works. His love of the cloister is well expressed in his declaration: "In all things I sought quiet, and I found it only in retirement and in study." But such a life was to make less and less appeal to Wessel, and in the end he became a strong opponent of monasticism. It was an indication of his early independence of judgment and understanding of himself that great as was his reverence for Thomas, he did not respond to his invitation to enter the cloister life. Unlike Luther he did not feel that he could not live a religious life out in the world, and that he must enter a convent to save his soul.

In speaking of the influence which Thomas exerted upon Wessel, not only during his youth, but throughout his whole life, Ullmann draws this suggestive contrast between teacher and pupil: "In Thomas piety and devotion greatly predominated. With an irresistible predilection, he plunged into the contemplation of divine things. Satisfied with Scripture and a few good books, unconcerned with the changes of systems taking place on the arena of science, and with no wish to reform the ecclesiastical statutes, he was perfectly content, when under all the restraints that the Church imposed, he was able to win the hearts of men to the love of God. In Wessel, on the

contrary, the thirst for knowledge and the taste for action greatly predominated, without impairing the piety of his heart. His desire was to master everything the age afforded as worthy of being known. He learned languages, changed systems, vigorously fought his way in the world, disputed, strove, contradicted the reigning opinions, and burned with desire to apply his hand to the improvement and reformation of the corrupt state of the Church."

His earliest biographer informs us that "from his boyhood he had always something singular and inwardly repugnant to all superstition." This appears in his relations with Thomas, who held the medieval notions as to the value of the intercession of the Virgin. When, on one occasion, he was urging upon Wessel the cultivation of devotion to her, he is said to have received this reply: "Father, why do you not rather lead me to Christ, who so graciously invites those who labor and are heavy-laden to come unto him?" The students in the schools of the Brethren were accustomed to a rather austere life, but fasting was not required of them. Upon this, however, Thomas placed great emphasis and he urged it upon Wessel, who thus expressed his conception of true Christian asceticism: "God grant that I may always live in purity and temperance, and fast from all sin and crime."

Hardenberg is authority for the statement that, as a consequence of Wessel's expressed dissent from certain statements in *The Imitation of Christ*, which to his more practical and critical mind seemed objectionable, Thomas so revised them that the book when published showed "fewer traces of human superstition." There is nothing inherently improbable in this. Freedom in the expression of his opinion was one of Wessel's most prominent traits. And doubtless Thomas recognized his unusual mental power and discrimination, or he would not have admitted him to such intimacy. The incident also receives support

in the fact that this work is less marred by monastic superstitions than his other works.

Very few incidents in Wessel's life at Zwolle have been preserved. It was a time of great prosperity in the brotherhood. The number of laymen and clergymen composing the order, together with the students in the school, was so great that they were obliged to occupy a number of different buildings. In one of the smaller of these, The Little House, Wessel and fifty other students lived under their Procurator, Rutger von Doetenghen. The life was semi-monastic, the students as well as the older members wore a monk-like habit, and were tonsured. Each had his cell, and each his appointed duties. Even after he became one of the teachers, Wessel is said to have assisted the Procurator in preparing the whey for the students' meals. Paulus Pelantinus, a friend of Wessel, has thus in his *Epicedium* described him in the monkish garb which he could not have altogether loved:

> "Humbly he moved about with cowled head
> And body covered with the yellow robe,
> While his unshaven face a veil concealed."

Among his fellows in The Little House was a gifted youth from Cologne, an accomplished painter, whose strong religious bent had led him to join the Brethren. His cell was beside that of Wessel, and they were accustomed—contrary to the rules, no doubt—to talk through a hole in the wall that separated them. They became intimate friends, and as is so often the case in student friendships, each contributed something to the development of the other. Wessel taught his friend such secular knowledge as he possessed, and in return received from his maturer companion "instruction in the fear and love of God."

It has already been noticed that the officers of the school manifested their confidence in Wessel's scholarship and character by appointing him one of the undermasters or lectors. He was then a senior, and taught the second class below him. It was perhaps in this position as teacher, at any rate it was during the latter part of his stay at Zwolle, that he developed views and manifested a bold independence of mind that exposed him to criticism, or, perhaps, just student teasing. As a consequence, he is said to have written a defense of his positions, and to have left the school sooner than he might otherwise have done. The incident has interest as indicating his early disposition to do his own thinking and express and defend his views. It was prophetic of his whole academic career.

Zwolle was not in any sense a preparatory school for admission to a university. The course there had its own definite purpose, largely religious, and quite distinct from any system of professional training. Wessel was probably in the early twenties when he left Zwolle, and he had completed, or nearly completed, the course of instruction there given. Yet when he came to Cologne, he did not at once enter the university, but one of the preparatory schools organically connected with it. The Netherlands then possessed a university of its own, that at Louvain; but it was still a comparatively new institution, having been founded in 1425. It was already leading a vigorous life, but it lacked the distinction that attached to Cologne, where some of the great masters in theology and philosophy had studied or taught. But besides its illustrious name, Cologne held another attraction for Wessel. It offered him a scholarship. A native of Groningen, named Laurentius Berungen, who was a professor of theology in the university and a canon in the cathedral, had in 1440 founded a bursary, or we might say, provided livings, for students from Groningen. It was known as the

Laurence Bursary, and to its privileges Wessel was admitted on his coming to Cologne.

The medieval university had resulted from the desire to provide instruction wider in range and more efficient in method than that given by the two types of school, cathedral and monastic, which had preserved the meager learning of the Dark Ages. These had, in the main, contented themselves with the giving of such instruction as was needed by the priest and the monk. But the introduction of new studies and new methods of teaching, together with the need of some adequate form of organization for the rapidly growing scholastic communities, led to the organization of the university. The steps by which the earlier schools attained to this form of organization were not in every case the same. But usually a school had grown to considerable size and to recognized importance before it obtained, from the pope or monarch, the charter which conferred upon it the privileges of a university. There were two original types of university, that of Paris, and that of Bologna, and after one or the other of these all the later medieval universities were modeled. It is difficult to determine which was the older, but the Magna Charta of the Parisian school was given by a papal bull of Gregory IX in 1231. That gave to the large scholastic community which had grown about the cathedral of Notre Dame the powers and privileges of a corporation. It is interesting to recall that the original conception of a university was that of a guild, or artificial brotherhood. Each craft, each form of merchandise had its own guild. There were guilds also for the promotion of interests of all sorts, from the cultivation of religion to the maintenance of a city's defenses. It was through membership in a guild that the ordinary individual obtained protection and citizen rights. This was the most common form of social and industrial organization.

Hence, when the members of the teaching force in the school that had grown up about the cathedral in Paris, and the mature foreign students in the law-school at Bologna, felt that they needed the protection and the privileges that organization would afford them, they sought to have themselves chartered by the secular or the ecclesiastical authority as an academic guild. In Paris, it was the professors who became thus organized. They were constituted as a guild of masters in the teacher's craft. The students were later included in the guild or university privileges as apprentices in the scholar's trade. Among these privileges was exemption from the control of the local authorities, from certain taxes, and from military service. The guild of teachers had the powers of a corporation; it could receive gifts and legacies and defend itself in the courts. As an institution chartered by the pope the University of Paris had the right to give to its graduates a diploma conferring on them "the right to teach anywhere." In the academic guild, graduation corresponded to the admission of the apprentice to the privileges of a master craftsman.

The typical university consisted of the four faculties of arts, theology, medicine, and law. At the head of each faculty was a dean, while an annually elected rector was the highest executive officer of the academic community. In Paris, the faculty of theology overshadowed all the others; and for centuries, students of theology in all parts of Europe aimed to complete their studies at Paris. It is indicative of the backwardness of Germany that a score of schools in Italy and France and two in England had been chartered as universities, before the first German school, that of Prague, in 1347, attained to this stage of development. It soon counted its students by the thousand, for Bohemia was then the most highly civilized and prosperous state in the Empire.

It was forty years after the founding of the University of Prague that the school in Cologne, which under the supervision of the Dominicans had already gained a wide reputation, was at the desire of the city council given the rank of a university. It received its charter in 1388 from Pope Urban VI, in whose pontificate the papal schism began. Apparently, the emperor took little interest in the school. But the popes continued to show it special favor and give it financial assistance, with the natural result that the institution became and remained ultramontane in sympathy and allegiance.

The city of Cologne was one of the most important in Germany. Its bishop was the foremost of the ecclesiastical electors, and took rank with the great secular princes. It was a member of the Hanseatic League, with a commerce that caused it to be compared with Venice. Within its walls converged the various interests of the populous Rhine valley. Its citizens were distinguished not in manufacture and trade alone, but in the arts and sciences and in aspiration after popular liberty. Ullmann has thus characterized the conflicting intellectual forces which there met: "In Cologne, the most subtle scholasticism met with the most devout mysticism; the strictest orthodoxy with the boldest heresy; the extreme bigotry and ecclesiastical legality of monachism with the most licentious anti-nomianism of fanatics and enemies of the Church."

Even before it became a university, the theological school at Cologne had given distinction to the city. Albertus Magnus, "Doctor Universalis," who to his theological learning added a knowledge of the natural sciences which caused him to be popularly regarded as a sorcerer, had spent most of his life in the school there. One of his pupils and his successor at Cologne was Thomas Aquinas, in some respects the greatest of the medieval theologians.

Duns Scotus had also taught there, having gone thither from Paris.

The close relation between the city and the university is indicated by the fact that four of the burgomasters were its standing wardens, and the town council and the citizens contributed to its support. The university was, in a sense, the daughter of that of Paris, with all whose rights and privileges it was invested by the papal charter. It was self-governing, independent of the local authorities; and for a time at least even its students were exempted from the jurisdiction of the civil courts. The theological faculty, which was by far the strongest, numbered as many as twenty-six doctors and twenty licentiates. It had fine apartments and enjoyed special prestige as the one theological school in the archbishopric.

Entrance into a university usually admits a boy to a larger life. It must have been so with Wessel. Cologne was a metropolis compared with provincial Groningen and Zwolle. Here all the tides of life were at the full. And the great university, with its freedom, with its mature students from many lands, with its various faculties and many courses of study, was in sharp contrast with the quiet, semi-monastic, and undeniably narrow schools of the Brethren, in which he had hitherto studied. No doubt an ambitious youth such as Wessel experienced a quickening of his intellectual energies as he entered into the larger and intenser life of the city and the university.

The chronology of Wessel's life is still an unsolved problem, and it is impossible to ascertain just how many years he spent at Cologne; but it appears probable that he remained there till he was thirty or a little past. We have no detailed record of his university career. His industry, his remarkable powers of acquisition, and the fertility and independence of his mind revealed themselves here even more than at Zwolle. He readily obtained the master's

degree in literature and the arts, and eagerly applied himself to the study of philosophy and theology.

Theology was unquestionably "queen of the sciences" at Cologne, for in that subject the university was esteemed second only to Paris and Prague. But the spirit in which it was conceived and the method of its teaching were far from satisfactory to Wessel's free and critical mind. He felt keenly its inadequacy at the time, and in later life often took occasion to refer disparagingly to it. Theology was there presented not as a reverent search for the truth relative to the nature of God, but as an exact science, whose boundaries were sharply drawn, and whose methods were those of syllogistic certainty. The creative period of Albert and Duns Scotus had been followed by one of intolerant dogmatism, of rigid and persecuting orthodoxy. The theological teachers had not kept abreast of the thinking of the period. They had not profited by the liberal mysticism of Tauler and his followers, nor had they endeavored to possess themselves of the elements of truth in Eckart's pantheistic speculations. They had learned nothing from the existence and criticism of the Brethren of the Free Spirit and other anti-ecclesiastical movements. The various evangelical influences of the age, which came to their fullest expression in the Hussite reformation, had no other effect upon the teachers of theology at Cologne than to arouse their suspicion and inquisitorial zeal. One of their representatives was chief prosecutor in the trial of John of Wesel for heresy and association with the Jews and Hussites. Another framed a famous handbook for the detection and conviction of witches; while the obscurantist attitude of the university was to be strikingly displayed a generation later by its violent opposition to Reuchlin and the New Learning. It was the boast of Laurentius, the founder of the Groningen fellowships, that at the martyr-

dom of Huss at Constance, he had pushed that Christian hero back into the fire!

Theology at Cologne had gone to seed. The professors had nothing more stimulating to offer than extracts from Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, which they interpreted and elaborated. There was little or no appeal to Scripture and no effort to acquaint the student with the rich treasures of the patristic literature. Wessel found little satisfaction in the exercises of the theological class-room. The lectures that he attended raised difficulties rather than solved them, while the studies that he was carrying on independently made him the more impatient with the inadequacy of the class-room presentation of difficult matters. It was no wonder that he astonished his fellow-students and perplexed his teachers by the many bold questions with which he plied them.

As has been the case with many another earnest student, dissatisfaction with the exercises of the lecture-hall drove Wessel to extensive reading and independent research. To such a man the university library is worth much more than the faculty. Wessel became an extensive reader in the libraries of Cologne, especially in that of the Benedictines. Among the writers that left a deep impression upon him was a twelfth-century abbot of the little town of Deutz just across the Rhine from Cologne. He spent much time in the convent library there. Its learned abbot, Rupert, had written extensively on theological subjects. He had manifested a reverent dependence upon the Scriptures as the chief source of divine truth, and he had indulged great freedom of speculation regarding matters that had since been fixed by the authority of such great teachers as Thomas Aquinas. Rupert was also a man of earnest practical piety, and had boldly condemned the abuses in the Church and the corruptions in the monastic life of his time. His writings tended to confirm Wessel in

his allegiance to the Scriptures as indispensable to the theologian, and emboldened him in his criticism of the current doctrines and customs of the Church. It is said that it was Rupert's influence that first led Wessel to abandon "the Church's fiction of transubstantiation."

The university gave no encouragement and afforded no opportunity for humanistic studies. A student who was at Cologne somewhat later than Wessel states, in a humorous poem, that there "no one could teach Latin correctly, or lecture soundly on Rhetoric or Poetry, and that Virgil and Cicero were as contemptuously despised as swines' flesh by Jews." Yet in the libraries in Cologne were the materials for an acquaintance with at least some of the ancient classic writers, for Wessel began there the studies which later rendered him famous as a Humanist.

Before the invention of printing, the copying of a much desired book by a student was a not unusual thing. Even after printed books had come somewhat into use, we read of Zwingli making with his own hand a copy of the Pauline Epistles from Erasmus' recently issued edition of the New Testament. This he did that he might have the letters in the original, and in a portable form. It was an indication of Wessel's scholarly interest and industry that he early formed the habit of making extensive excerpts from the authors that he read. His training as a copyist in the schools of the Brethren, doubtless, rendered this task the less irksome to him. While at Cologne he began a collection of miscellaneous quotations, with comments of his own. It contained passages from Greek and Latin authors, especially the Fathers, and from later philosophical writers. The collection grew with the years, and Wessel carried its many volumes about with him when he traveled. It was an armory from which he took the weapons needed in his forensic encounters. Half humorously he called it

One of the Many Gates to Mediæval Groningen

"The Great Sea" as if it were formed of streams from all lands.

Not least among the accomplishments of his years at Cologne was the acquaintance which he there gained with the Greek and the Hebrew languages. There were at the time no facilities for such studies offered by the university. Wessel was however able to obtain tutors. Turkish invasion was already driving Byzantine scholars into Europe. Two such refugees, Greek monks, had found asylum at Cologne; and it was from them that he acquired his first knowledge of the Greek tongue. Hebrew he learned from some educated Jews in Cologne or its vicinity. The knowledge of Greek and Hebrew was such an unusual thing at the time that it constituted its possessor a marked man, and in Wessel's case it provoked many incredible tales as to his wonderful linguistic accomplishments, tales that suggest Borrow's pretentious title: *Metrical Translations from Thirty Languages.* These stories we may well dismiss as apocryphal, for at the time it constituted Wessel a sufficient marvel to be known as "a three-language man."

While he may have undertaken these studies in order to read the Scriptures in the original, yet his desire for an accurate knowledge of the Greek philosophers also influenced him in the same direction. For in connection with the scholastic theology he had been led to an acquaintance with the Greek sages, especially Aristotle and Plato, from whose diverse spirit and modes of thought the two leading parties in current theological discussion took their rise. He early manifested a strong preference for the Platonic philosophy, from the same consideration, doubtless, that influenced the Greek Fathers, viz: its idealism and points of obvious contact with Christian truth. In the contests between the Realists and the Nominalists he had aligned himself with the former. By

much study of the subject and by frequent discussions with his teachers and his fellows, he had acquired such skill and confidence in debate that he felt disposed to champion the cause of the Realists in the contests which were then raging at the University of Paris. Thither he was now to turn his steps, and so enter upon the second period of his life.

His years at Cologne had not cooled his early piety. He was still preëminently interested in religion. His interest in the Bible, his dislike of the theological instruction of his day, his study of the languages, his wide reading in ancient literature, his eagerness in debate, these were all expressions of an ardent religious life and an alert, resolute mind

CHAPTER IV

HIS EARLY MANHOOD

If Wessel, in deciding to leave Cologne, had intended to proceed at once to Paris, he was to meet with unexpected detention. The reputation which he had already won for ability and scholarship resulted in his being called to a chair of theological instruction in the neighboring University of Heidelberg. The invitation came in the name of the count of the Palatinate, who was interested in building up the school in his capital city. The position was offered upon advantageous terms and presented a favorable opportunity to begin the career of a teacher. It would have given Wessel academic standing, and would have provided him with an assured means of support. But at this time, he was more concerned to continue his studies under new masters than to devote himself to the instruction of others. And as for the question of financial support, that does not seem ever to have been a matter of grave concern with Wessel, who may have had some personal income from his parents' estate. At any rate, he was not driven to teach for a livelihood; nor do we find him pursuing patrons and pleading poverty, as was Erasmus' custom. Later in life, Wessel was again to be called to Heidelberg and was to exert an important influence in the affairs of the university, but now he thought it best to decline the Elector's tempting offer. The theological department at Paris then exerted a centripetal energy greater than any one school of the

present day, and Wessel in common with all other ambitious divinity students felt its powerful attraction.

But although Paris was the goal of his desire, he did not go thither at once. Instead, he took testimonials from the university at Cologne as to the period of his study and his standing as a scholar there, and with these presented himself for admission at the university at Louvain. This young institution had in the decade or more that Wessel had been at Cologne made great progress in its theological department, having in the oft-expressed judgment of Wessel excelled the older university in the development of a liberal and scientific spirit. In the following century, however, it was to undergo a decline and become reactionary; and with Cologne it was to unite in opposition to the New Learning and the evangelical movement. But at this time its freer atmosphere proved very congenial to Wessel's enquiring mind, and he enjoyed his intercourse with its professors and profited by his brief stay there. He had, apparently, felt the need of having another viewpoint than that of Cologne, before venturing into the sharp intellectual contests of the Parisian school. It is impossible to ascertain how long Wessel remained at Louvain, but probably not more than a year; for he reached Paris sometime before 1454. He was then about thirty-four years of age.

As Paris for the next fifteen years and more may be regarded as his home, and studying and teaching there his chief employment, we are naturally interested in the condition of the city and the state of the university, especially its theological department in which Wessel sought instruction. To-day, all roads in France lead to Paris. It sets the standards of thought and the fashion in dress and manners. But in the fifteenth century Paris did not occupy this unique position. There were rival provincial capitals with their ducal and archiepiscopal

courts. However, Paris enjoyed the distinction of a long and honorable history.

Clovis had made it his capital, and though it lost its political prominence during the period of the Carlovingians, under Hugh Capet and his successors it became again the leading city of the realm. This proud position, during all the vicissitudes that accompanied the breakdown of the feudal system and the long conflict with England, Paris never lost. At the beginning of the fourteenth century Philip the Fair had made it the seat of the "Parlement," the highest court of the nation. And with the unification of the French states under Louis XI it became the abode of a strong centralized government—a true national capital.

During Wessel's residence there, Paris had a population approximating two hundred and fifty thousand. It was already adorned by many of the architectural monuments that still excite admiration. Northern France was the birthplace of Gothic architecture, and the city then possessed such noble examples of that style of structure as Notre Dame and the Sainte Chapelle, besides many others of less distinction. The main streets of the city had been paved since the reign of Philip Augustus. But the dwelling-houses were huddled close together; the streets and alleys were very narrow, and were unlighted at night save for the tapers that burned before the image of the Virgin at the street corners. Those venturing out at night carried a torch or lantern and went prepared for attack. Street brawls and robberies were common, and the presence of several thousand students, exempt from police jurisdiction, did not contribute to the orderliness of the city.

Politically prominent as Paris was, it had long enjoyed an even greater prominence in the educational world. Its Cathedral School under royal patronage and the administration of able bishops had won distinction even

before it was chartered as a university by Pope Innocent III at the beginning of the thirteenth century. It had been favored by the services of some notable educators, among whom were William of Champeaux and his more distinguished pupil and successor, Abélard, whose brilliant career marked an epoch in the history of education. It was the leading school in northern Europe, and in theology the foremost in the world. As has been noticed already, it possessed the distinction of being the first school to be organized as a "University of Masters," and was the model after which all the northern universities were to be framed. It was a corporation of professors and students, "Universitas Magistrorum et Scholarium." Though complex in its inner organization, it was divided along large lines into two kinds of groups or circles. So far as the subject of their study was concerned, the members of the university separated themselves into four sections, or faculties, those of Arts, of Theology, of Canon Law, and of Medicine. But the members of the university were also segregated with reference to the region from which they came. These national clubs with their separate club-houses or dormitories were known as Nations. The organizations among the foreign students in some of our larger institutions afford us a hint as to the character of these associations of men of similar nationality. In Paris at this time there were four of these Nations: French, Picard, Norman, and German. These national groups were, with the exception of that of the Normans, subdivided into smaller or provincial circles. For example, within the German Nation there were three divisions, one for the Germans proper, another for the Netherlanders, a third for the English. One would expect that Wessel as a Dutchman would have joined the German Nation, but according to a custom of the university, following an earlier political division, the Netherlands were

counted as a part of Picardy, so Wessel became a member of the Picard Nation. It was doubtless because of this arbitrary arrangement that John of Picardy became for a time one of Wessel's main instructors.

Just at this time the university of Paris was enjoying its greatest prosperity. There were other noble schools in France, but that at Paris was the pride of the whole nation. This was partly due to its illustrious past, but more to the fact that it was the school at the national capital, patronized by the king and fostered by the pope, and on nice points of theology and canon law appealed to by princes and prelates in all Christendom. The theological department under the leadership of the Sorbonne, its most distinguished school, had become a kind of court of last resort in theological contentions, and a rival authority to the pope himself. The university was often spoken of as "the Eldest Daughter of the King," and the monarchs sometimes expressed their concern for its welfare by interfering in its management. While Wessel was in Paris Louis XI, in an edict designed to place Nominalism under royal embargo, thus addressed the university authorities: "But chiefly is the Faculty of Theology in Paris extolled, which like a brilliant star has, by the splendor of its rays, kindled and illumined, not only our kingdom, but the whole world."

While, as in other universities, the largest numbers were in the department of Arts, which was in a sense preparatory to the other departments, yet, as already implied, the theological faculty overshadowed all the others, and dominated the policy of the institution. This had been the case for a century or more. During the seventy years that the popes resided at Avignon the papacy became almost an appanage of the French monarch. All the more desirable positions in the gift of the Church, with their influence and revenue, were within easy reach of ambitious

Frenchmen. But one of the chief prerequisites for the ascent of the ecclesiastical ladder was training in theology and canon law, especially the former. As a consequence, the school at Paris was thronged with aspirants for ecclesiastical and political prizes. Its instruction drew many students, since it seemed to offer the most remunerative field for the sale of technical training. It is conceded that this influx of place-seeking candidates for theological degrees had an injurious effect upon the theological faculty at Paris. Its subjects were not being studied or taught for their own sake, but as a means to ecclesiastical preferment. Moreover, tempting vacancies occurred so frequently, that half-trained men were constantly leaving the university to accept positions of power. The discipline of the school naturally suffered in consequence. The university came thus to share in the demoralization which was everywhere apparent during the so-called Babylonish Captivity.

But a decided improvement in its tone took place when the French control of the papacy ceased. The Great Schism, which followed the popes' return from Avignon, resulted in a still further loss of papal prestige, but fortunately ended the French monopoly of papal favors. It, however, opened indirectly the way to a nobler prominence of the French people in the affairs of the Church. Her policies were now to be largely dominated by the University of Paris. With rival popes anathematizing each other, and with the nations of Europe aligned in partisan interest behind them, there was sore need of a wise adviser and a disinterested umpire. The University of Paris assumed this difficult rôle and played it with ability, if not always with success. In the failure of papal authority it invoked the long-neglected authority of a General Council. And not only did the university induce the distracted Church to adopt this means for her relief, but through its great

representatives in the Reforming Councils, d'Ailly and Gerson and others, it dominated their policies. So theological science, as represented by the university, came to a place of unprecedented influence in the Church and in the State. For a time, it spoke with an authority greater than that of any prince, indeed, greater than that of the pope; for the anomalous spectacle of two, and even three, successors to Saint Peter disconcerted the boldest advocates of papal supremacy.

It was soon after the theologians at Paris had rendered this large service to the Church, that there revived among them the old contention between Realism and Nominalism. As it was interest in this contention that at the first drew Wessel to Paris, the subject requires more than passing notice. Scholasticism or the theological system of the later Middle Ages has been defined as an application of reason to theology, not in order to revise the creed or explore for new truth, but to systematize and prove the existing traditional beliefs. Its great maxim was the dictum of Augustine that, "Faith seeks knowledge," religious belief endeavors to justify itself to the intellect. The Schoolmen sought in the two greatest sages of antiquity materials from which they could construct logical buttresses for the traditional dogmas of the Church. Aristotle was their chief dependence, both as to matter and method, and he came to occupy a place of authority as great as that of the most prominent apostle. In this respect his position resembled that held by Philo in the Alexandrian theology. His system was studied at first in the translations of Boethius, later in versions of his Arabic interpreters, and finally, as in the case of Wessel, in the original Greek. But with the Schoolman, Plato was always something of a rival to Aristotle. His influence was exerted indirectly at first through Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius, but later, with the coming

of the New Learning, his writings were read in the original.

The fundamental question at issue between the Realists and the Nominalists was this: Have our so-called universals objective reality, or are they simply convenient forms of thought with no existence outside our minds? A representative Realist such as Albertus Magnus would affirm that universals exist in a threefold sense: "*ante rem*" in the mind of God as Plato had taught, "*in re*" in the individual of the species according to the Aristotelian doctrine, and "*post rem*" as a subjective concept in the mind of man. The Nominalists affirmed that the only existence that the universal possesses is the last mentioned. It was a product of the mind, an abstraction, a verbal sign, a mental convenience. Between these two extreme positions there were many mediating ones, such as the Formalism of Duns Scotus and the Conceptualism of Abélard. The contention took a new phase with each new creative thinker. It was a problem that challenged every adventurous mind.

It was more than an academic contention, it had important practical bearing in the realm of dogmatics; just as the evolutionary hypothesis, which relates primarily to biology, has profoundly affected the theological thinking of our generation. The doctrines most involved in the scholastic controversy were those relating to Anthropology and to the Nature of God. If the Realists were right and the thing that we call "Man" has distinct existence apart from men, then we can reason about the effect of Man's Fall in Eden, and frame a doctrine of original sin, and the conditions of its remedy. But if the term refers only to a mental concept and not to an objective reality, then the doctrine of original sin hinted by Paul and elaborated by Augustine loses its philosophical support. And so with the doctrine of the Trinity. The Realists affirmed that

the basal, the generic idea was that of Deity, in which the three persons participate as concrete expressions, individualizations of Deity. The Nominalists declared that this destroyed the distinct personality of Father and Son and Spirit, and was no better than Sabellianism. But the Realists replied that if there was no reality corresponding to the term, Deity, then the divine persons had no adequate ground of unity, and the result was practical Tritheism. A like antinomy arose in the doctrine of the Divine Attributes. When, for example, the Realist affirmed the objective existence of divine justice, the Nominalist replied that that was to separate God from his own attributes. But to the Nominalist contention that one should speak, not of the justice of God but only of a just God and a wise God, and so forth, the Realist objected that that was to imply as many Gods as there were divine qualities, which was nothing less than Polytheism.

It was these dogmatic consequences of the contention that kept it alive from generation to generation, and caused it to engross, for a time at least, so earnest and practical a man as Wessel. And there was one other element in the conflict which needs to be noticed. In a sense, Realism had come to be recognized as philosophic orthodoxy. Nominalism had been under the ban. But in Occam in the fourteenth century it had found an able and fearless champion, and had won many adherents, among them such distinguished members of the theological faculty at Paris as d'Ailly and Gerson. As representing dissent against current opinion and usage, Nominalism became to some degree identified with the cause of intellectual liberty and with progress and reform in the Church. In some notable cases it formed affiliation with Mysticism, and to its own critical tendencies added insistence on a deeper spiritual life for the individual. Nominalism

thus served as a bond of intellectual interest to those who in the fifteenth century and the next were impatient with current dogmatism and eager for reform in the administration of the Church. Hence, it was not strange that it fell under official condemnation. In France the civil authority had repeatedly attempted its suppression. The last of these attempts, as already noticed, was made by Louis XI in 1473. Wessel was then living in Paris and is reported to have been prominently concerned in the matter. Louis was hardly suited to the rôle of champion of orthodoxy, though as morally fit as many another. History has recorded little in his praise, and he is said to have served Machiavelli as a model for his literary portrait of *The Prince*. But Louis had seen the political advantage of securing papal aid to the French monarchy, and had signalized his devotion to the papacy by repealing in 1461 that charter of Gallican Liberties, the Pragmatic Sanction. It was due doubtless to the pope's influence that he undertook to suppress the spirit of dissent and criticism in the foremost school in his realm. He took pride in the new title of "Most Christian King and Defender of the Catholic Faith," and it was in this character that he issued an edict addressed to the University of Paris in which he enjoins the faculties of Arts and Theology to teach and defend the "safe and sound doctrine of the Realists," and forbids the public or private teaching of Nominalism or kindred doctrines anywhere in the realm. All teachers were required to take an oath before the Rector that they would obey the edict. Banishment or excommunication might follow refusal. Nominalist writings must be delivered up to an appointed officer for safe keeping. This obscurantist policy of the King had an effect quite the opposite of that intended. It awakened popular interest in the proscribed doctrines. The university authorities also began to devise ways of evading

the requirements of the edict, and were so successful that its terms were soon relaxed and ultimately the edict itself was repealed.

An understanding of this contest at Paris is important in explaining the change of party which Wessel underwent soon after his coming to Paris. Realism had been the accepted system at Cologne. Wessel had espoused it with such ardor that he wished to become its champion at Paris, where he heard that it was being assailed. But apparently until he came to Paris, he had studied only under Realist teachers and he had not heard what could be said on the other side. He had the cheerful confidence of those who have never discovered how strong a case can be made by their opponents. He himself informs us that he came to Paris with the expectation of converting two of his fellow-countrymen, who were teachers there, from the errors of Nominalism. But evidently he saw things in a new light after his arrival. There was more to be said in opposition to Realism than he had ever imagined. Moreover, he must have soon discovered that by natural bent and disposition of mind he belonged with the Nominalists, who as has been said stood for intellectual freedom and criticism and reform. It is immensely to Wessel's credit as a scholar and a man that he so readily acknowledged his error and defeat, and abandoned the cause which he had expected to champion. One naturally recalls in this connection the experience of his more distinguished fellow-countryman, Arminius, whose maturer thought led him to attack the Calvinistic System, which as Professor of Theology at Leyden he was expected to defend.

Wessel thus records his change of opinion: "But after meeting men stronger than myself, I perceived my own weakness, and before three months had passed, I yielded my opinion, and forthwith with all zeal searched

the books of Scotus, Maro, and Bonetus,—writers who I had learned were the leaders in that school. Not content with that, before I had spent a year in studying as diligently and thoughtfully as I could the doctrines of Scotus with which I began, I discovered graver errors in those than in the teachings of the Realists, and being ready to be corrected, I again changed my opinion and joined the Nominalists. And I frankly confess, that if I thought the latter held any views contrary to the faith, I am prepared to-day to return to either the Formalists or the Realists."

That this radical change of front does not indicate any fickleness of opinion or instability of mind on Wessel's part is shown by the fact that to the end of his days he remained a consistent and loyal Nominalist. As Hardenberg has expressed it: "As he did not find a safer path, or one which more nearly approached the simplicity of Scripture and of the ancient Fathers, he adhered to the sect of the Nominalists, bringing all that was excellent in the doctrine of the Schools to the highest perfection."

It is difficult, with our limited data, to understand just what was Wessel's relation to the University of Paris during the fifteen and more years that he spent there. As he had attained to the degree of Master of Arts at Cologne, he was entitled to admission in that Faculty at Paris, but there is little to indicate that he held a regular professorship. We might naturally expect that he would qualify for the Doctor's degree, yet he does not seem to have been concerned for that distinction, though later his lack of it proved a serious disadvantage to him. It is evident that while he was in Paris Wessel was both student and teacher. This alternation in academic relations was not an uncommon thing in the medieval universities. Before printing came into general use, there was no way to get the views of a fellow professor except to enter his class-room, or get access to his manu-

scripts. Hence professors in one institution or faculty were often students in another. There is something comparable to this still, for one frequently sees in German university lecture-rooms mature men who are holding chairs of instruction in other institutions.

There are those who have attributed to Wessel official prominence in the University. De Thou in his History of France speaks of him as "the restorer of the University," and Mezeray informs us that he was at one time Rector. But it is impossible to authenticate these statements. It seems more probable that Wessel's position in the University, besides being that of a student in Philosophy and Theology, was that of licensed teacher, "privat-docent" we might say. There were many scholars in those days who spent their whole lives in the universities, without holding or seeking to hold any regular professorship. They preferred the freedom of a student, teaching privately, perhaps lecturing to voluntary classes, but not obligating themselves to meet regular professorial appointments. This would seem to have been the case with Wessel, and it would appear that this loose relation to the University did not prevent him from becoming an influential man in the academic community. This was due partly no doubt to the large place that public disputations or debates had in the medieval university and Wessel's fondness and marked aptitude for these forensic encounters. He apparently won his way to recognition by these public discussions and the conferences of the class-room, and no less by his own acknowledged ability as a teacher and the promoter of the studies of others. He made his impression at Paris by the direct impact of his personality upon his associates, for his books are the product of his later years.

There is a persistent legend to the effect that Wessel was famed for his skill as a physician. Ubbo Emmius,

head of the college in Groningen in the sixteenth century, asserts positively that Wessel was not only the intimate friend but the medical attendant of Pope Sixtus IV. There appears to be no reason for doubting that he had acquired a knowledge of medicine, but whether at Cologne or at Paris cannot be ascertained. If he practiced medicine, even in the desultory way so common at the time, that might afford us a solution to the problem as to how he maintained himself during his long studies and extensive travels. But even in that case, his interest in medicine was wholly subordinate to his philosophical and theological studies. It is highly improbable that he came to eminence in the science of medicine. And as for his reputation for great skill in medical practice, that may have been due simply to the exaggeration of his friends, since the physician's art has always lent itself to popular superstition.

Our surest clue to Wessel's occupation during the years he spent in Paris is to be found in the brief notices of the masters under whom he studied, the intimate friends he made, the future scholars whom he influenced. Unfortunately, we know comparatively little of his Parisian teachers. That some of them influenced him deeply we have his own assurance. That he valued the instruction that he received there, and prized the library privileges, and enjoyed the academic atmosphere must be assumed to explain his long residence at the University of Paris. Wessel was not among those who involve biographical data in their ordinary writings; nor have many of his letters been preserved; so that our knowledge of his teachers at Paris, as well as many other matters, depends upon casual references to them, and brief statements by his earliest biographers.

The professors at Paris whom he mentions as among his teachers were all members of his own Nation of Picardy,

and they were evidently his personal friends. Two of them, Henry of Zomeren and Nicolaus of Utrecht, were, as has already been noticed, instrumental during his first year at Paris in changing him from a Realist to a Nominalist. Of the latter we know nothing. The former was from Brabant, was dean of the cathedral at Antwerp, and was a friend of Cardinal Bessarion. In 1460 he left Paris to become professor in the University of Louvain. Here he became involved in a series of controversies with a professor in the theological department over the question of future contingencies. It is indicative of the interest then taken in matters metaphysical that the dispute should have been brought to the attention of Pope Sixtus IV, Wessel's friend, who decided it in Henry's favor. The Pope felt the more confident to pronounce in such a recondite matter from having himself written a book on the subject. Of the three other teachers mentioned we know practically nothing. They are William of Phalis, John of Brussels, and John of Picardy. The last mentioned had been Rector of the University before Wessel's coming. He was evidently a man of unusual distinction, for he had been for many years at the head of the Faculty of Arts.

The standing that Wessel acquired in the academic community at Paris may be inferred from the prominence of two of his intimate friends. One was Cardinal Bessarion, a highly cultivated Greek, who is described as "the Mæcenas of all exiled Greeks." He had studied at Constantinople, and had been archbishop of Nicea. He was prominent among the representatives of the Greek communion who at Ferrara and Florence had labored for the union of the Roman and Greek Churches. After being honored by the pope with the gift of the red hat he remained in the west. His house in Rome was an asylum for Greek exiles, and a center of classical studies. In 1455 he was a prominent candidate for the papal throne,

and was later entrusted with many important diplomatic missions. It was such a mission, that of mediator between the duke of Burgundy and the French king, that kept him at Paris at the time that he formed his friendship with Wessel. To Bessarion has been attributed one of the names by which Wessel is known. It is related that this cultivated Greek found the word, Wessel, difficult of pronunciation, and in their friendly intercourse changed it to Basil, its near equivalent in Greek, and the name of the founder of the monastic order to which the Cardinal belonged. There was an implied compliment in this nickname, as Basil was one of the great scholars of the patristic age.

An even more distinguished friend of Wessel in his Parisian days was an Italian named Francis de Rovere. He was not so eminent as a scholar as was Bessarion, but honors fell thicker upon him. Born of humble parents, a few years before Wessel, he early entered the Franciscan brotherhood and devoted himself to study. He became a trusted representative of that order as teacher of theology in several Italian universities. When he was fifty years of age he was made General of his order; three years later, through the influence of Bessarion, he was raised to the rank of Cardinal and four years thereafter became Pope Sixtus IV.

While Wessel and Francis may have had common scholarly interests, they were men of strongly contrasting types, and their friendship illustrates the attraction of opposite poles of temperament. Francis was a friar, a man of the world, a patron of humanistic studies, and not above the common faults of his age and class. Wessel was a pious scholar, with a strong critical and reformatory bent. Yet these men were intimate friends at Paris, and as we shall see were associated in Rome. Francis frequently sought to lead Wessel to join his order, as a

means, doubtless, to his preferment. But Wessel showed no more disposition to join the friars than he had in early life to become a monk. He was developing a strong aversion to the ascetic life, and while it did not interfere with his friendship for Francis, it did eventually bring him into collision with the monks.

The esteem in which Wessel was held in the generation after his death must be attributed to his personal influence upon his students and associates at Paris and elsewhere. His writings, which belong to the latter years of his life, do not seem to have been widely read, until after printing came into vogue. That he should have been called "Lux Mundi" by his admiring disciples is in itself indicative of his superlative success as a teacher, yet we have the names of comparatively few men of prominence who were among his students while he was in Paris. Two of these, who became famous Humanists, merit special notice. They are Rudolph Agricola and John Reuchlin. The former, who was more than twenty years Wessel's junior, was a fellow-countryman, having been born a few miles from Groningen. It is supposed that they had been acquainted in their native land. Agricola was in Paris several years during Wessel's residence there, and a warm friendship grew up between them. They had the common bond of race and region, and an interest also in the classics. Agricola has left the statement that while Wessel was not in a strict sense his teacher, yet he was a friendly promoter of his studies and induced him to undertake the mastery of Hebrew. He also bears testimony to the wholesome religious effect of Wessel's influence over him. Agricola was to become a lecturer on the classics at Worms and Heidelberg, and a writer of note.

Of Wessel's relation to the more famous Reuchlin we have less specific and first-hand information. He came to Paris with the margrave of Baden in 1473, after Wessel

had returned from Italy. He was then an eager youth of eighteen, and he sought instruction of the now famous scholar. From him he is said to have received "his introduction to philosophy and the ancient languages, and guidance to the original and genuine fountains of the Aristotelian doctrines." Melanchthon was of the opinion that he also taught him Hebrew, in whose popularization among scholars he was to meet violent opposition and also win his greatest distinction. Reuchlin's own statement seems to deny that Wessel had taught him Hebrew, but it is probable that, as in the case of Agricola, he induced him to take up that study.

There is another side to Wessel's residence in Paris that deserves notice here. He had prominent friends and admiring students, but he also had adversaries. That was to be expected of one so independent of mind and so forcible in speech. He courted controversy, championed new ideas, attacked old usages in the Church, and advocated reforms in the life of the University. Naturally he made bitter enemies. If his disciples called him "Lux Mundi," there were others who believed that "Magister Contradictionum" was a more appropriate title. Unquestionably, there arose in certain quarters violent opposition to him. There was a legend current in Hardenberg's time that Wessel was driven out of Paris by his opponents, but if there is any basis to this story, it must have reference to his later visit to Paris, for at the conclusion of his first residence there he went to Rome in the suite of the future pope. In his youth, as we have seen, Wessel had a rather narrow escape from the monastic life, urged upon him as it was by Thomas à Kempis. Later in life he strongly reacted from it, and with good reason, for in the fifteenth century monasticism was in a state of moral decline, and was engaged in vain attempts to reform itself. Nevertheless, monasticism was still a

The Entrance to the Convent of the Spiritual Virgins in Groningen

very influential institution. The Church and the universities were largely under the control of the various monkish orders. In criticizing monasticism Wessel made powerful enemies; and at Paris the monks evidently began to manifest toward him that enmity which later was to endanger his life and finally resulted in the destruction of many of his writings.

If Wessel was as outspoken in other matters in which he differed from current opinion as he was on the subject of indulgences we can readily imagine the storm that he would precipitate. In a letter to Jacob Hoeck he writes: "Not only now but thirty-three years ago, because I was irresistibly carried away with zeal for the truth, I repeatedly maintained before all the learned men at Paris that from boyhood it had always seemed to me absurd and unworthy that any man (meaning the pope) by his own verdict can increase the value of a good work in the sight of God—doubling its worth, for example, simply through the accession or intervention of a human decree."

There is reason to believe that Wessel had some important part in certain reforms that were instituted in the University. Certainly the moral conditions in Paris, and in the other large student bodies of the Middle Ages, were such as to excite the rebuke of a man of Wessel's earnest piety. The contrast there presented to the simple devout life of the students at Zwolle was too striking not to call forth his criticism. We have his opinion concerning conditions in Paris and Cologne. He laments the lack of Christian morals and religious interest. After speaking of the cold reception that Paul's gospel found in Athens, he says: "The study of the sacred sciences, when it is merely superficial and not animated by a higher spirit, is not in itself particularly acceptable to God. In fact, what I saw when living in Cologne and Paris was doubtless rather odious to Him, I mean, not the study

of the sacred sciences, but the moral depravity with which it was mixed up." In the same connection he applies our Lord's condemnation of the scribes to those in the universities who were engaged in sacred studies for which they had no real love. But it would seem that Wessel did more than criticize the abuses in the life of the University. He assisted in ways that have not been recorded in bringing about their amendment. The statement of De Thou that he was "one of the restorers of the university," and the association of his name with those of William of Paris and Gerson, in a sixteenth-century letter to Henry II, as men of the highest learning who had sought to amend the errors and abuses of the times, are intimations of Wessel's reformatory influence in the University of Paris.

There is an utterance of Wessel which belongs to his Paris days and is characteristic of his independence of mind and reluctance to submit to any human authority, even though it be that of the great Master, Thomas Aquinas. When he was urged to let his dictum settle a matter under dispute he replied: "Thomas was a Doctor, what then? I am a Doctor, too. Thomas hardly knew Latin, and it was the only language he did know: whereas I am master of the three principal tongues. Thomas scarcely beheld Aristotle's shadow, but I have seen him in Greek, and among the Greeks."

CHAPTER V

HIS LATER MANHOOD

It is impossible to ascertain exactly when Wessel left Paris. But it could not have been later than 1470, for in one of his letters he speaks of being in Rome during "the penultimate year of Paul II," who died in 1471. Thus his first residence in France had lasted about sixteen years. Part of this long period he had spent in travel, visiting many of the cities and schools of France. Among these he especially mentions Angers and Lyons. One incident in his visit at the latter city he recalled many years afterward. It is trivial in itself, but that it should have made so lasting an impression upon his mind is indicative of the wholesome simplicity of his nature. While he was in Lyons there occurred the death of a man whose dog was so devoted to him that he refused all food, and lay upon his master's grave till he perished of grief and starvation. Wessel often alluded to this incident, contrasting the perfect devotion of this dog to his human master with our imperfect devotion to our divine Master.

The occasion of Wessel's going to Rome is nowhere definitely stated. Several of his Parisian friends and teachers were there, and it seems probable that he went thither in company with his friend Cardinal Rovere, who was soon to become Sixtus IV. It has been the complaint of many popes that everyone that came to Rome had an axe to grind, but Wessel was not among the seekers of

office or other favors, who thronged the approaches to the Papal Court. He could have indulged no hope of ecclesiastical preferment, for he was neither a priest nor a monk, and had no intention of becoming either.

He evidently went to Rome as he had gone to Paris, as a student of philosophy and theology. That Italy was the seat of the most advanced humanistic studies must have had its influence, though to him classical learning was always subsidiary to philosophy and to his desire to come face to face with the Greek sages and the authors of the New Testament. At this time the Italian schools were attracting many scholars from the north. As the ambitious student of theology felt that his training was incomplete without a period of study at Paris, so the student of the classics or of canon law believed that he must cross the Alps and visit the seats of the ancient Roman civilization and hear some of the famous Italian savants. Many of these students naturally gravitated to Rome, not only because of its archeological interest, but because academic as well as ecclesiastical positions were there to be obtained. While the greater part of Wessel's Italian sojourn was spent at Rome, yet his humanistic interest led him to visit the schools at Venice and Florence. At the latter city the Platonic Academy established by Cosimo de Medici, and the library of Greek and Latin and oriental manuscripts begun by him, were attracting men of note from all parts of Europe. Marsilius Ficinus was then at the head of the school. Wessel's friend Cardinal Rovere had studied there, and later Reuchlin was to find his way thither. And later still the brilliant young linguist and philosopher, Pico della Mirandola, was to solace his disappointment and end his unhappy career there.

In this Academy, as in the ancient theological school at Alexandria, Plato was revered as an inspired sage and prophet, and his philosophy and that of his Neo-Platonic

successors was taught as the true basis of theology. No doubt, under such influences Wessel's preference for Plato as against Aristotle, whose philosophic method formed the basis of current Scholasticism, received strong reinforcement. He does not, however, appear to have been favorably impressed with the life of the city, brilliant as it was, and later he contrasts it unfavorably with the simpler manners of his fellow-countrymen at Zwolle.

Concerning Wessel's visit at Venice only one incident has been recorded. While he was there a papal commission was engaged in conducting the investigations into the life and alleged miracles of a candidate for canonization. Of these transactions Wessel was an interested witness. And whatever may have been his personal opinion as to the claims that the Patriarch of Aquileia had to be numbered with the saints, he did not hesitate, later, to say that such a process as was required by canon law involved much less peril to the Church than the earlier method of canonization in response to local and popular demand.

It may be noted in passing that Wessel, wide as was the range of his interests and varied as was his learning, was apparently unimpressed by the beauty of the Italian scenery or the monuments of Rome's classic splendor, or by the dawning art of the Renaissance. In this he simply reveals himself as the child of the Middle Ages, which took little delight in the beauty of the world, and apart from architecture showed but little interest in the fine arts. Even Erasmus, exquisitely sensitive as he was to the charms of a literary masterpiece, apparently cared nothing for the works of the painter or the sculptor; and passed through some of the most beautiful regions in Europe without making any mention of them in his letters or journals. Luther, also, crossed and recrossed the Alps on foot on his memorable journey to Rome, but was apparently so engrossed in his own thoughts that the

sublimity of the Alpine scenery made no impression upon him.

If Wessel's visits to Florence and Venice were due to his humanistic and philosophic interest, his much longer stay in Rome must be attributed to some other cause. Paul II had suppressed the Roman Academy, and not without good reason. A system of academies had sprung up in the larger Italian cities under the impulse of the New Learning. They afforded a convenient organization for those interested in humanistic studies, and provided an agency for the propagation of their views. The Academy at Rome was unfortunate in the character of its founder, a Calabrian of noble parentage, who had assumed the old Roman name of Pomponius Loetus. His interest was wholly archeological, and he came to assume an attitude of contempt toward religion and the clergy, while he feigned a devotion to the customs and worship of antiquity. He possessed genuine talent as a lecturer on the classics and on the monuments of ancient Rome, and by this means won a large following. He affords a striking example of the tendency among the Italian Humanists to break away from the Church and its restraints, and revive ancient pagan religious ideas and morals. Under his influence the Roman Academy became the center of a group of young men who were interested in humanistic studies. They chose new names from classic antiquity, as the northern Humanists of a later period were to Latinize or Hellenize their names, and they sometimes observed pagan festivals and even parodied the most sacred services of the Church. Finally, as the climax of their folly, they hailed Pomponius as Pontifex Maximus! This, occurring almost under the shadow of the Vatican, was more than papal patience could well endure. The pope had the leaders imprisoned for a time, dissolved the Academy, and forbade anyone to mention the

matter in his hearing. This happened a year or two before Wessel arrived in Rome. It goes without saying that he would have had little sympathy with Humanists who had no interest in philosophy and sneered at religion. Doubtless there were in Rome devotees of the New Learning of a different sort, but the outrageous conduct of those connected with the Academy and the frown of papal disfavor had discredited the movement for the time.

Paul II, who was pope when Wessel came to Rome, was more interested in enlarging his collection of antique curios and works of art and in erecting noble Renaissance buildings than he was in giving encouragement to the literary men who haunted the Eternal City with the hope of obtaining papal patronage. He frankly declared that he disliked their society, and he openly rebuked their loose talk and careless living. In his private life he set an example of simplicity and industry which those about him in the Papal Court seemed little disposed to follow. He had done what he could to maintain the nobler traditions of the papacy, but the dominant influences of his age were hostile to his better purposes. Upon his unexpected death in August, 1471, two of Wessel's intimate friends were prominent candidates for the papal throne. Bessarion was the senior cardinal and enjoyed unrivaled distinction as a scholar, but he was a Greek and was politically unacceptable to the French. So the choice fell upon Francis de Rovere, a younger man, of scholarly attainments and tried administrative ability, who chose the name Sixtus IV. In securing his election, however, the determining factor was not so much his evident intellectual qualification for the high office as the shrewd manipulation of the cardinals by his ambitious nephew, Giuliano.

The pontificate of Sixtus began in a way to dishearten

those who hoped for improvement in the administration of the Church. He first undertook to discharge his political debts and appease his disappointed competitors. He handsomely rewarded the cardinals who had assisted in his election; but it was upon his nephews, especially the profligate Giuliano, that he lavished honors and benefices that should have rewarded high character and faithful service to the Church. So Sixtus began a pontificate that for consistent and unblushing nepotism surpassed anything that Rome had ever witnessed. But in elevating his relatives to places of power he was not concerned chiefly to favor those of his own blood, but rather to surround himself with those on whose allegiance and coöperation he could depend. On the young nephew who had successfully intrigued for his election, Sixtus conferred the cardinalate, five bishoprics, and the patriarchate of Constantinople. Other benefices rapidly followed, until this comparatively obscure youth possessed a revenue like that of a king and dazzled Rome with the magnificence of his establishment and retinue. Another nephew, a layman, was made Prefect of Rome, and to secure him an advantageous marriage with a Neapolitan lady of rank, the pope sacrificed the papal claim on Naples. In celebration of this alliance, the visit to Rome of another Neapolitan princess was made the occasion of an entertainment by the cardinal nephews, which in lavish splendor and ingenious extravagance amazed even the spectacle-sated Italians and became a matter of comment in all the courts of Europe.

It is easy to conceive of the effect produced upon Wessel by this misuse of his high office by his friend Sixtus. He was doubtless astonished to witness the rapidity with which the temptations of papal power could convert a scholarly monk into an intriguing politician. However highly he may have regarded his friend as

Pope Sixtus IV Holding an Audience

From a painting by Melozzo da Forli, in the Vatican

Cardinal Rovere, he could not withhold his severe disapproval of him as Pope Sixtus IV. He did not permit his friendship or gratitude for past favors to blind his judgment; and in his writings there is a significant silence regarding his intimacy with this pope whose policy he so heartily condemned. It is stated by early biographers of Wessel that he was for a time private physician to Sixtus. There seems to be no adequate reason to deny this, for Wessel's unusual skill in medicine is beyond question.

There is one characteristic incident in Wessel's relation to his friend, after he became pope, which practically all his biographers report. When he called upon the new pope to present his congratulations, he was asked what favors he would like to have conferred upon him, and made this reply: "Most holy father, my kind and just patron, there is nothing with which I would greatly burden your Holiness. I have never sought great honors, as you know; but since you now sustain the character of the Supreme Priest and Shepherd upon earth, I pray that your reputation may correspond with your name; and that you may so administer your high office that when the great Shepherd of the sheep, whose chief servant on earth you are, shall come, he may say: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." And you fearlessly may say: "Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo, I have gained other five talents." Sixtus replied: "This shall be my concern; do you ask something for yourself." "Well then," said Wessel, "I beg you to give me a Greek and a Hebrew Bible from the Vatican library." "These shall be given to you," said Sixtus. "But, you foolish man, why do you not ask for a bishopric or something similar?" Wessel answered: "Because I do not need it." The much-desired manuscript of the Bible in the original tongues was given to him, and was added to the little library that he appears to

have carried about with him. It was taken by him to the convent in his native Groningen where he spent his last days, and there was treasured for a long time. Fragments of it were there to be seen as late as the middle of the seventeenth century. It has been assumed that it was his friendship for Wessel that led Sixtus, in the second year of his pontificate, to give papal sanction to the Brethren of the Common Life. This may be true, but a pope as much interested as was Sixtus in advancing education would naturally have been disposed to show favor to an institution which had contributed so many of the leading scholars of his day.

It is evident that Rome, in spite of the friendship of the pope and others high in ecclesiastical circles, was not a comfortable place for a man of Wessel's independence of mind and rather austere moral code. The life of the city was rent by turbulent factions, whose fortresses and garrisons constantly threatened an outbreak of violence. The populace was as fickle in its favor as it was abject in its devotion to the hero or patron of the hour. The crowd that had gathered to cheer Sixtus on his coronation day became suddenly angered by a delay in the procession, and even began to throw stones at the papal litter! To live thus in the midst of alarms must have been distasteful in the extreme to one who had always been accustomed to the quiet atmosphere of the schools.

Especially repugnant to Wessel must have been the gross immorality of the papal city. Its condition, at the time, was a scandal to Christendom. Those who are familiar with modern Rome, clean, well-governed, orderly, and at least outwardly decent, can hardly conceive of the unrestrained disorder and vice which characterized Rome of the fifteenth century, and made it a moral plague-spot. As it was constantly visited by ecclesiastics and politicians from all parts of Europe, its low ideals of life

tended to infect society generally. But what may well have proven most shocking to Wessel was the demoralization of those in highest ecclesiastical station. Petrarch during his residence at Avignon had said that all that had been written of the gates of hell might well be applied to the papal court there. It may be doubted whether the papal court at Rome in the latter part of the fifteenth century was any improvement on that at Avignon. The prevalent system of ecclesiastical preferment tended to surround the pope, who might himself be a man of irreproachable life, with courtiers and sycophants whose chief aim was to gratify their ambition or turn the golden stream of church-revenue into their private coffers, or lead the life of a voluptuary. The favorite nephew of Sixtus affords a striking example of this type of papal courtier. His spectacular career of extravagance and self-indulgence was cut short by the death of a debauchee at twenty-eight, after he had been cardinal but three years.

It is not altogether uncommon to find moral laxity masking itself behind an intolerant orthodoxy. And it is not strange that in Rome with all its flagrant immorality there were those who were violently opposed to any variation from dogmatic uniformity. Wessel, who was as distinguished for his piety as for his learning, found himself, because of his freedom in theological speculation, an object of suspicion. He was pointed at as a man who held revolutionary ideas, and yet was given no opportunity to state and defend his views. After his friend became pope, Wessel was apparently a resident in the papal palace and was under papal patronage and protection. But before that, his position was less secure and his views more subject to criticism or ridicule. In a letter, written a long time afterward, Wessel describes a social occasion on which an effort was made to embarrass him by the implication that he held unsound views regarding

indulgences. The incident occurred soon after he came to Rome. He with several other scholars from Paris were invited to dine by the pope's chamberlain. Apparently there were many prominent men present. In the course of the dinner one of the Parisian theologians called attention to Wessel's strange views on indulgences, and expressed the wish that one of their colleagues at Paris, a former disputant of Wessel's, might have been there to discuss the matter with him. A smile passed around the table; but the host, to prevent any embarrassment to his guest, closed the incident by saying: "That is nothing new." Later, however, Wessel freely stated his position regarding indulgences, and was surprised to find that there were those, even in high ecclesiastical circles, who held views far more advanced than his own. For, as was noticed above, Humanism in Rome had tended to render some of its adherents critical or indifferent to Christian doctrine.

Luther, whose visit to Rome occurred a little over a generation later, found skepticism still further developed there. He was shocked to discover great laxity of religious opinion and open unbelief among those in confidential relations with the pope. It is impossible not to contrast Wessel's visit to Rome with that of Luther. The German was younger, less sophisticated, and of a more ardent and demonstrative nature. He had long desired to visit the city of St. Peter, believing that some unique spiritual grace was there to be obtained. At the sight of the city he exclaimed: "Hail to thee, Holy Rome!" and prostrated himself upon the ground. After transacting the business for his order which had brought him thither, he made general confession, climbed the Scala Sancta, made a reverent pilgrimage of the churches and the catacombs, and believed implicitly the fabulous tales told him by his guides. He even wished that his parents were dead, so

that he might at this advantageous place say masses and do penance for their release from purgatory. This he used to recall with indignation. Yet his eyes were not wholly blind to the seamy side of Roman life, though he was still under the spell of its traditional sanctity, and gave little thought to it at the time. He noticed, however, that some of the Roman priests rushed through the sacred service of the altar with such indecent haste that they celebrated seven masses while he was engaged in one. He also heard from them expressions of frivolous unbelief, and saw indications of their corrupt living. While he was there, the pope returned from a sanguinary campaign in which he had himself conducted the siege of a town. He noted with astonishment that whenever the pope appeared in public it was in regal magnificence: the papal cortege resembled a triumphal procession. Nevertheless, Luther returned to Germany apparently unaffected by what he had seen, still venerating the Holy City, still obedient to the Roman hierarchy. It was not till years after that he was to say: "I would not have missed seeing Rome for a hundred thousand florins, for I might have felt some apprehension that I might be doing injustice to the pope. But as we see, we speak!"

There is no indication that his much longer stay in Rome made any such lasting impression upon Wessel. At least he makes few allusions to it in his writings. He came to Rome an older man and in a more critical spirit, already disillusioned as to the peculiar sanctity of the papal hierarchy. What he saw simply confirmed what he had heard, and confirmed also his opinion that the authority of a priest of whatever rank depended wholly upon his commanding what Christ required. It was in this spirit that he freely criticised the evil conduct of those high in ecclesiastical station, and did not hesitate even to condemn the action of his friend, Sixtus IV, when he claimed that

his exalted office exempted him from the obligation to keep his oath. It is highly creditable to him that he maintained this attitude of manly independence toward his exalted patron, and yet did not sacrifice his friendship. Ten years later, so it would seem, Sixtus, then near the end of his career, invited him to visit Rome again; but he did not go.

Wessel's stay in Rome could not have exceeded two or three years, and that period included his visits to Venice and Florence. Some of his early biographers entertained the idea that he also made extended journeys in Greece and Egypt. But that seems highly improbable, if not impossible. Upon leaving Rome in 1473 Wessel appears to have gone back to Paris, and to have remained there in the neighborhood of a year. It was at this time that he made the acquaintance of Reuchlin, then a youth. If we are to credit the statement that at the request of Louis XI Wessel and some others undertook to bring about a settlement of the long-standing quarrel between the Nominalists and the Realists at Paris, this is the time that it occurred. It is evident that at this time Wessel did become involved in serious controversy at Paris, so that it became uncomfortable and perhaps dangerous for him there. It has been stated that he was driven out of Paris because of "his severe handling of the superstitions of the theologians." However that may be—and it is not improbable—it was during the year 1473 that his friend David of Burgundy, Bishop of Utrecht, wrote a letter to him in which he urges Wessel to come to him and thus alludes to the peril to which he is exposed: "I have long known of your illustrious ability as a teacher, and I also know that there are many who would ruin you. They shall never do it so long as I am alive to protect you, so come soon, that I may talk over everything with you and have near me one in whom I delight my soul."

Evidently Wessel's position in Paris at this time was one of genuine danger, which may explain his removal soon after to Basel, where he resumed his intimacy with Reuchlin. He does not appear to have had any official relation to the University, but, as formerly at Paris, he privately taught theology and Greek and Hebrew. There was at Basel a remarkable library collected by Nicholas of Ragusa during the years that the Reforming Council was in session there, and this may have attracted Wessel. But Wessel's residence in Basel, where Erasmus chose to end his days because of its scholarly and liberal atmosphere, was not to be long. In 1477 he was called by Philip, Elector of the Palatinate, to the chair of theology in the University of Heidelberg. It will be recalled that more than twenty years before he had received a similar call from Elector Frederick.

The University of Heidelberg was nearly a century old and had attained considerable distinction. The Electors had made provision for its maintenance and development. Under Philip, whose reign began in 1476, it enjoyed a period of exceptional prosperity. This liberal-minded prince sought to adorn his court by surrounding himself with men accomplished in science and literature. He invited some of the most noted scholars in Germany to occupy chairs of instruction in his university. It is indicative of his liberal spirit that he should have chosen for his Faculty of Theology a man of Wessel's well-known independence of thought. Heidelberg was already a successful rival to Cologne, which resisted the New Learning and became, in matters of theology, a citadel of obscurantism, and suffered decline in consequence. Heidelberg, on the other hand, welcomed the New Learning and was to have the honor of training many men who became leaders in the Protestant movement. Most prominent among these were Philip Melanchthon and Martin Bucer.

Wessel was fifty-seven years old when he was invited to the chair of Theology at Heidelberg. Evidently the position attracted him. He was now in later middle life, with views matured, and was willing to assume the regular duties of a professorship and settle down to the pleasant routine of a teacher's life, something from which he had hitherto shrunk. But the men in the Faculty of Theology at Heidelberg did not share the Elector's liberality of spirit, nor did they relish the prospect of having this famous champion in theological debate, this "Master of Contradiction," this free-lance in controversy, as one of their colleagues. They may also have been somewhat apprehensive on account of his well-known deviations from current theological teaching. Their attitude reminds one of the demurrer of the Theological Faculty at Berlin when, under the influence of Bismarck, Adolf Harnack was called thither from Marburg.

The theologians at Heidelberg raised a technical objection to Wessel's teaching among them; he had not received the degree of Doctor, which the rules of the University required. Evidently the Elector did not think this an insuperable obstacle, but in order to comply with the letter of the law Wessel volunteered to undergo an examination for the Doctor's degree. But to this the theologians objected that inasmuch as he had not been ordained to the priesthood he was not eligible to the degree of Doctor. In that age many a man, without a trace of genuine piety, had received ordination as a means of securing some coveted office or honor. Æneas Sylvius, literary adventurer, politician and libertine, had thus in later life opened the way for his elevation to the cardinalate and the papal throne. But Wessel was of a different temper; he had withstood the persuasion of his monkish friends, and had waved aside the many advantages that ordination to the priesthood would have offered him.

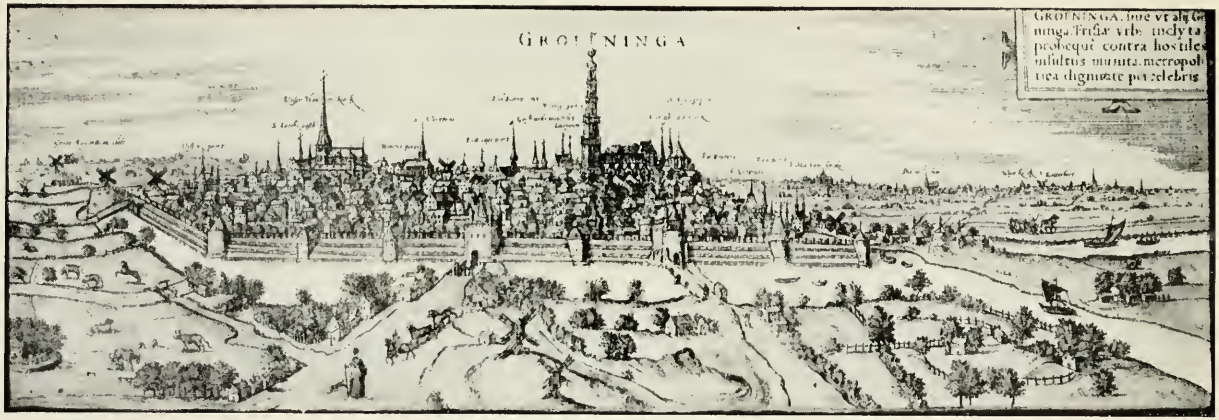
He would not now take the solemn vows of the priest merely to remove a technical obstacle to his teaching theology. When years before he was a student at Zwolle he had, like the other lads there, received the tonsure, but on leaving the school he discarded this mark which the Church puts upon her prospective servants. When asked why he had not retained the tonsure, which many students continued to wear, though they had no intention of entering the priesthood, because it offered them a certain standing and protection and also exemption from prosecution in the secular courts, he made the characteristic reply that he needed no such protection as he "had no fear of the gallows, so long as he kept his wits."

Though unwilling to remove the technical obstacle to his teaching theology in the University, he was retained presumably through the influence of the Elector, as teacher in the philosophical department, in which his Master's degree entitled him to give instruction. Here for two or three years he taught Greek and Hebrew and philosophy. From any of these subjects the way lay open to discuss theological matters, nor did Wessel lose the opportunity to express his opinions on the doctrinal questions of the day or to present his criticisms of the administration of the Church. Just at this time the old controversy between the Realists and the Nominalists had been renewed at Heidelberg with a violence which was in a way an indication of the active intellectual life of the institution. As was often the case among the turbulent students in the medieval universities—there being no athletic sports or dueling to afford an outlet for their surplus physical energies—the young scholars at Heidelberg made their philosophical differences an excuse for frequent combats in the streets. They came to blows over the question of the proper use of the vocative case, and the Elector had to forbid their debates concerning the

immaculate conception of the Virgin. If Wessel took part in these heated controversies, and it is difficult to believe that he was able to refrain from such an indulgence of his lifelong fondness for discussion, he was certain to arouse the bitter enmity of some of his colleagues. In fact there are those who affirm that it was because of the controversies in which he found himself involved and the consequent hostility of some of his fellow-teachers that he withdrew from the University.

But there is another explanation of his comparatively short stay at Heidelberg. He realized that by remaining in a place of such prominence he was exposing himself to persecution. He was known to hold views concerning indulgences and the authority of the pope and powers of the Church and the efficacy of the sacraments quite different from those commonly held and taught. He was also an intimate friend of John of Wesel, who was about to be tried and condemned for heresy. He naturally felt that his position, with enemies among his colleagues, was a very insecure one. A little later, he was to write to a friend: "I am afraid of no danger that I might have to encounter for the purity of the faith." But the situation at Heidelberg, with the theological department opposed to him and the attention of the students engrossed in philosophical controversies in which he had but a waning interest, offered him small encouragement to stay. Hence, sometime before 1479 he gave up his position in the University, which like that of some other academic positions of the time carried no fixed salary, and returned to his native Groningen. So ended Wessel's relation to the schools, in which more than forty years of his life had been spent.

It has already been noticed that Heidelberg was to become a nursery of Protestant leaders, and there is reason to believe that Wessel's liberalizing influence con-



A Profile of Mediæval Groningen. The Spires of the Convent of the Spiritual Virgins Appear Just to the Left of the Tower of the Church of St. Martin. The Location of Adwerd is Indicated at the Extreme Left

tributed much to render the institution hospitable to evangelical doctrine. It is interesting to recall that early in the fifteenth century Jerome of Prague, a disciple of Wiclif, had taken the Master's degree at Heidelberg and had produced great excitement there by posting on the doors of the Church of St. Peter a list of theses much more revolutionary and Protestant than those which Luther more than a century later posted upon the doors of the castle church in Wittenberg. The University authorities prohibited him from discussing his theses in public, and, the fact that a few years later Jerome was condemned and burned as a heretic by the Council of Constance no doubt also tended to discredit his views. But with Wessel's coming to Heidelberg a new line of more liberal influences began. Rudolph Agricola, also a native of Groningen, and a friend and disciple of Wessel, spent his last years there. Reuchlin was also for a time there, so was Jacob Wimpheling whose attacks upon the monks and advocacy of a better discipline for the clergy contributed somewhat to the preparation for the Reformation. In the next generation Melanchthon was a student there and many others who were to be leaders in the Protestant movement. And hither also in 1518 Luther came and held a memorable disputation.

Lutheran influence, however, was not destined to shape the doctrinal standards of the Protestant Church of the Palatinate. The Heidelberg Catechism, which was to become the most widely-accepted symbol of the Reformed Churches throughout the world, was the product of Heidelberg itself. While it is true that Ursinus and Olevianus were most conspicuous in its composition, their work was done, as the Elector himself declares, "with the counsel and assistance of our whole theological faculty, also all superintendents and principal Church councilors." In other words, the Catechism represents the type of

Protestantism which had grown up in the Palatinate. As such, it may be said to have been the product, in part at least, of influences started nearly a century before by Wessel and his pupils in the University. Even a cursory reading of Wessel's writings will serve to confirm the impression of a spiritual kinship between him and the framers of the Heidelberg symbol.

CHAPTER VI

HIS LAST YEARS

On leaving Heidelberg Wessel appears to have gone directly to the region of his birth, with the purpose of spending the remainder of his life there. He doubtless felt the strong attraction which the scenes of his youth exert upon a man as old age approaches. Unless we adopt Muurling's rather improbable view that Wessel retired to Groningen in the interval between his residence at Basel and his call to Heidelberg, we have no reason to suppose that he had spent any considerable time in his native land since nearly forty years before he had left it to enter Cologne University. He was now sixty years of age and was doubtless weary of the wandering life and academic conflicts to which he had once been devoted, and longed for a more quiet existence and the opportunity to crystallize his views and give them permanent presentation on the written page.

But another consideration must have had much weight in the forming of his decision to return to Groningen. He had made enemies, both among the monks whose superstitions he had ridiculed and among the theologians, whose teachings he had combated. He had found Paris unsafe and Heidelberg uncomfortable. He well knew the fate of the heretic and believed, probably with good reason, that the inquisitors who had begun process against his friend, John Burchard of Wesel, for many years a fearless

preacher of righteousness at Worms, would soon turn their attention to him. In February, 1479, Burchard was arraigned, on the charge of heretical teaching, before a Court of Inquisition held in the Franciscan Monastery at Mainz, the seat of the Archbishop. He was then an aged man and feeble, and had been further weakened by imprisonment and anxiety. After some wavering he endeavored to make his peace with the inquisitors by recantation. He thus escaped the fire, but was condemned to imprisonment for the rest of his life, which fortunately proved short. It is to be noted that his chief offence was his attack upon indulgences, which Wessel had also attacked, and that among his inquisitors were members of the theological faculty at Heidelberg, men whose enmity Wessel had good reason to fear.

Hence it seems altogether probable that the chief consideration which led Wessel to leave, just at this time, the conspicuous position of professor of philosophy at Heidelberg and to retire to remote Groningen in the diocese of his friend the Bishop of Utrecht was the very natural apprehension that if he remained in his professorship he might at any moment be seized and tried for heresy. This is made quite evident by a letter which he wrote in April, 1479, from Zwolle to the dean at Utrecht, a friend of his, who possessed great legal knowledge and experience in ecclesiastical trials. In this extremely interesting letter he expresses his lively sympathy with Master John of Wesel then in the hands of the inquisitors, and urges his friend to advise him how to proceed in case the inquisitors begin process against him, as he has been informed they are about to do. The letter concludes thus: "I beg of you to reply quickly, in order that you may abundantly refresh one who thirsts for your advice and trusts no less to the wisdom of your counsels than to the justice of his cause. I do not fear anything that I may

have to undergo for the purity of the faith—if only there be no calumny. As I have revealed these matters to you in confidence, conceal them, I entreat you, from all others." It is not improbable that he may have also written to the bishop of Utrecht reminding him of his promise of protection given six years before when he was in danger of an attack from enemies in Paris. Be that as it may, the threatened inquisition did not take place, and Wessel enjoyed ten years of tranquillity and perfect freedom to write and teach.

His home-coming to Groningen was in the nature of a triumph. The joy and pride with which he was welcomed by his countrymen were suitably voiced in a Latin panegyric ode written by the President of the Gymnasium at Zwolle. It celebrates "the happy return from Italy of that most eminent and admirable philosopher, Master Wessel of Groningen." The mention of Italy and the allusion in the ode to Italian cities that had competed for the honor of Wessel's residence might seem to imply that a sojourn in Italy had intervened between his leaving Heidelberg and going to Groningen. But it seems more probable that the author, with some poetic license, was simply contrasting Italy, the source of the New Learning, with the Germanic lands into which Wessel and others were introducing it. The ode, which is itself an example of the pedantry which the New Learning tended to foster, may be paraphrased as follows:

"Thrice welcome home, thou scholar far-renowned,
Of Letters Prince, most favored of the Muse,
Beloved alike by God and Fatherland,
Teutonia's glory, whom she hails with joy.
Greetings to thee, and honor, and such praise
As only the Pierian Nine can sing.
At last, thou deign'st our poor retreats to grace,
And lendest splendor to our humble walls:

In vain did Venice and most mighty Rome
And Florence fair entreat thee to remain;
Nor hast thou on thy country hitherto
Conferred the honor of thy residence.
But now, we trust, thou wilt with us abide,
To teach our youth the polished Roman speech,
And guide them through the Greek and Hebrew maze;
To be our Galen, vanquishing disease,
Our second Vergil and our Cicero:
Then shall thine own Germanic Lands rejoice
And praise high Heaven for such a priceless gift,
For thou shalt bless them with the boon of Health,
And with the liberal arts their fame enhance."

If those who thus eulogistically welcomed Wessel home expected to receive benefit from his presence among them, they were not to be disappointed. For their famous countryman had not simply come home to die, as many a distinguished man has done, but the ten years that remained to him were in many respects the most fruitful of his life. He still carried on his theological studies, enjoyed association with influential men, and possessed the always coveted opportunity to mingle with students and impart to them the truth which he had gained. Distinguished scholars from abroad visited him, and an extensive correspondence with his friends and students of other years kept him acquainted with the progress of thought in the educational centers in which he had once been a well-known figure. Though he had withdrawn to remote Frisia he had not fallen out of the life of his time. This is strikingly illustrated by the fact that it was while he was living in Groningen that his friend, Pope Sixtus IV, invited him to make his residence at the papal court. It is also certain that many if not all of his writings that we possess belong to this last period of his life. Some of them, as for example the *Scala Meditationis*, dedicated

to the monks of Mount Saint Agnes, and many of his letters, bear clear internal evidence of this.

Although Wessel had refused the monastic life for himself, and had said and written much in its criticism, yet in the Netherlands the relation of piety and learning to the cloister was such that the convents afforded him his most natural asylum. Here he found a quiet atmosphere of scholarly leisure, collections of books, and the fellowship of those interested in the cultivation of the life of the spirit. Here he also found pupils, without which he could hardly have been content—so strong within him was the instinct of the teacher. He apparently traveled about somewhat in the northern Netherlands visiting his friends, but most of his time was spent in three convents, which he regarded as so many homes. The one to which he first went after his final departure from Heidelberg was that of the nuns of Saint Clara in Groningen. They are usually spoken of as the Spiritual Virgins. Their cloister was in the center of the city. In the profile of medieval Groningen shown in one of the illustrations the spire of what was doubtless their chapel appears a little to the left of the tall steeple of Saint Martin's Church. The convent buildings have been used of recent years as an orphan hospital. Wessel was recommended to the nuns of Saint Clara by his friend, their Bishop, David of Burgundy, who it has been thought compensated the convent for his entertainment. The nuns regarded him not only as a distinguished guest but as their spiritual father. He gave them religious instruction and composed devotional books for their use. Inasmuch as he appears to have spent most of his time in this cloister he must have deeply appreciated, especially as the infirmities of age approached, the tender care of the sisters, who honored him for his learning and revered him for his piety. It was here that his last illness and death occurred, and in the

choir of the convent chapel his body found its first resting-place.

A mile or more west of the city—shown also in the profile just mentioned—was the monastery of Adwerd, famed at the time for the beauty of its buildings, its fine library, and popular schools. Its buildings long ago fell a prey to the flames and to decay; only fragments of the walls are now remaining. A part of its library is possessed by the University of Groningen. This monastery was also one of Wessel's homes during his last years. He was doubtless more attracted by its library and its schools than by its monks, though he also concerned himself in their spiritual welfare. It was a custom of the monastery that during meal-time one of the monks should read aloud. He found that the books being thus read were not of an edifying character. Though ostensibly religious they were filled with trivialities, such fables and superstitions as were later to attract the ridicule of Erasmus and his friends. This reading was one of the chief diversions of the monks, but it wearied and disgusted Wessel almost beyond endurance. Yet he could not refrain from smiling now and then at some characteristic piece of monkish invention. On one such occasion when asked why he laughed at what the others took so seriously, he replied: "I am laughing at these barbarous lies. These books are filled not only with absurd but with harmful notions. The Sacred Scriptures and the devotional works of Saint Bernard would be much better for the Brothers." Since the reading of these worthless writings had very largely displaced that of the Bible, Wessel undertook to restore it to its rightful preëminence. His aim was not merely to induce the monks to read the Scriptures but to incite in them a desire to become able to interpret them. To accomplish this he used to read the Bible to the more intelligent of the monks and urge them to ask

for the explanation of passages that they did not understand. In order to encourage them to study Hebrew and Greek he used to point out the inaccuracies of the Vulgate translation, and ask for the originals that he might give them a more exact rendering. Sometimes, at their request, he would read from the Hebrew Bible, when they would be greatly impressed by the strange, unintelligible words uttered by their aged teacher. To the younger monks he delighted to expound the Psalms which they chanted in course in the daily services of the chapel. It was his custom, also, on the evenings, after the celebration of the mass, to read aloud the passages in the gospels containing the account of the institution of the sacrament and our Lord's discourses connected with it. But toward the end, his sight, always defective, so failed that these long readings to the monks became difficult or impossible.

But the field of Wessel's greatest service to the monastery and the occasion doubtless of his greatest delight was the school or rather the schools which Adwerd had long maintained. The one gave only elementary instruction, but the other taught such advanced subjects as philosophy and theology. In fact, one early writer affirmed that Adwerd was not so much a monastery as an academy. As far back as the thirteenth century it had distinguished foreigners among its teachers. At the time of Wessel's coming it had somewhat declined, but his presence gave a fresh impetus to its life. Not only did the number of its students increase, but learned men from all the region "were accustomed to spend weeks and even months at Adwerd in order to hear and understand that which would make them daily more learned and better men." As elsewhere, Wessel encouraged at Adwerd the study of Greek and Hebrew and the classics. He disparaged the current method of theological instruction and directed the students away from the scholastic writers

to the Scriptures and the early Fathers. With great assurance he used to predict that his students would live to see Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura and all the later wranglers in theology discarded by the best scholars, saying that "all these irrefutable Doctors, black and white-cowled alike, will soon find their proper level."

It was by thus exciting in his students the hope of a better day, not only for theological science but for the Church, and directing them away from the barren scholasticism of the time to a fresh study of the sources of Christian truth, that Wessel enabled the more able and earnest young men at Adwerd to assist in bringing about the better conditions that he predicted. Not only did the school greatly improve, so that it attracted students from long distances, but a better spirit was also manifest in the monastery itself. Nor did Wessel's influence at Adwerd cease with his death. Hardenberg, visiting the monastery many years after, wrote: "At that time there were in the monastery many examples of the better cloister life; and so long as the memory of Wessel was revered, and those who had been his students lived, this continued to be the case."

Of the incidents recorded concerning his life at Adwerd, two have special interest as reported by eye-witnesses. Among the distinguished men who visited there was a Parisian Doctor, who was placed with Wessel and others at the Abbot's table. Even while they were dining the new guest began to ply Wessel with questions to which, feeling that the time was unsuited to the discussion of such matters, he made no reply. But dinner being over, Wessel encouraged him to resume his inquiries and to his most difficult questions made such clear and illuminating replies that in astonishment he left his place at the table and kneeling before him with uncovered head exclaimed: "Either you are a second Alanus or an angel from heaven

or another being whom I will not risk to name. Blessed be God, my expectation has not been disappointed. I have not sought you in vain, nor was it without reason that the Master of Contradiction was admired and hated by those of the Sorbonne!"

The other glimpse of Wessel's life at Adwerd is preserved for us by Goswin, who at the time was among the younger monks in the monastery and a familiar attendant upon Wessel. He reports that he was frequently present at conversations between Agricola and Wessel in which they lamented the darkness resting upon the Church, condemned the common irreverence at mass and the celibacy of the clergy, discussed Paul's doctrine that men are justified not by works but by faith, and denied the authority which had become attached to mere human traditions. He further states that he had often served at the table where both of them reclined and had later lighted them to bed. Sometimes Agricola was so under the influence of liquor that he had to draw off his boots for him, "but no one ever saw Wessel in that state."

Wessel's third home was at Zwolle, where he had studied as a boy in the school of the Brethren of the Common Life. The Bishop of Utrecht had made some arrangement for his entertainment in the neighboring Augustinian monastery of Mount Saint Agnes, which under the persuasion of Thomas à Kempis he once thought seriously of entering. Here he spent a considerable portion of each year, partly because of his strong attachment to the region and partly that he might be accessible to his friend the Bishop, whose summer home at Vollenhove on the Zuyder Zee was less than twenty miles distant. When a youth, Wessel had made frequent visits to the monastery whose famous prior, Thomas of blessed memory, had honored him with his friendship. Thomas had lived to the advanced age of ninety-one, dying in 1471, less than a

decade before Wessel's return to the Netherlands. The influence of his deep mystical piety and of his long and wise administration of the monastery had given to Mount Saint Agnes a place of distinction among the cloisters of northern Europe. Thomas was concerned for the intellectual as well as the spiritual culture of his monks, had built up a creditable library, and had encouraged the more promising youth to undertake classical as well as biblical studies. Among those who had received inspiration from him in their student days were such notable leaders of the New Learning as Agricola and Hegius.

It may be assumed that Wessel found at Mount Saint Agnes many men of kindred spirit and abundant opportunity to cultivate in the monks the same love of the Scriptures and practice of vital piety which he encouraged at Adwerd. One incident in his relations with the monks at Mount Saint Agnes illustrates their need of instruction in order to distinguish between the form and the substance of prayer. When it was noticed that he used neither prayer book nor rosary, one of the brothers asked him if he never prayed. He replied: "With God's help I endeavor to pray always. Yet each day I repeat the Lord's Prayer, a prayer so pure and sublime that it would be sufficient if I said it but once each year." During Wessel's annual sojourns at Mount Saint Agnes he was frequently invited to visit his friend and patron the Bishop of Utrecht, who prized not his companionship only but also his recognized medical skill.

When a generation after Wessel's death, Hardenberg visited Mount Saint Agnes he found some of his friends and former pupils still there. They greatly revered the memory of their famous teacher and related incidents showing his learning and piety with such tenderness of feeling that Hardenberg found it difficult to restrain his tears. Some of the monks had learned a little Greek

and Hebrew from him, and possessed books in both languages that he had given them. The *Scala Meditationis* which he had composed for them assumed some knowledge of Greek on the part of the reader. Wessel was accustomed to write to his friends in the monastery and one letter from this correspondence, that to John of Amsterdam, still survives. Hardenberg was shown Wessel's Hebrew Psalter and Greek Nazianzen, and fragments of his own writings; but his *Mare Magnum*, which had been long in the possession of the monastery, had been loaned and so lost. Of the monastery itself there now remains hardly a trace, and if it were not for the slight elevation of land on which it stood, it would be difficult to determine its site. Like many another famous cloister in the Netherlands it was destroyed during the wars of religion that accompanied the Reformation.

It is interesting to notice who were prominent among the friends and pupils of Wessel during this last stadium of his career. Most notable among them because of his official position was the Bishop of Utrecht, whose name in secular life was David of Burgundy. He was a natural son of Philip the Good and hence a half brother of the powerful and ambitious prince, Charles the Bold. It was indicative of the extent of Burgundian influence over affairs in the Netherlands that Duke Philip could have forced his bastard son into the important see of Utrecht, to which another had been regularly elected. It required an army to set David upon the episcopal throne; but in the end he overcame all opposition and ruled as Bishop for forty years. He had the vices and the virtues that belonged to his age and station, and in spite of some serious defects of character had a rather successful career. He protected the rights and properties of the Church from civil encroachment, was a patron of the arts and sciences, and a friend of learned men. It was perhaps due to

Wessel's influence that he undertook the difficult task of reforming clerical education. His attempt to raise the standard of intelligence among candidates for orders by requiring them to undergo a public examination proved rather disappointing. Among three hundred who at one time underwent such examination only three acquitted themselves creditably. At the evident disgust of the Bishop, some clerical bystander said apologetically: "These times do not yield Augustines and Jeromes." To which the Bishop indignantly retorted: "No, but they need not be blockheads and bottomless pits of ignorance." The Bishop's attachment to Wessel was one of long standing. A letter of his written from Vollenhove in 1473, given in full elsewhere, promises Wessel protection from his enemies and urges him to make him a visit, saying, "I am eager to have near me a spirit in which I take delight." It is suggestive of the tolerant spirit of Wessel and his lack of pharisaical pride that he should have reciprocated the friendship and accepted the patronage of this secular-spirited Bishop whose personal life was a matter of public criticism and whose administration of his high office was in many respects alien to Wessel's principles.

Wessel had another friend connected with the cathedral at Utrecht. It was to him, "The Honorable Lord Master Ludolph van Veen, Dean of the celebrated church at Utrecht and Doctor of both Laws," that he had written when he believed himself to be threatened by the inquisitor. The letter, which appears elsewhere, is one that a man would not write except to a friend of whose loyalty and devotion he had no doubt. They had been associated in Paris and elsewhere, and their long friendship was reinforced by the fact that they had the same enemies. Ludolph's legal knowledge had enabled him to escape them and Wessel appeals to him to use it on his behalf. Apparently Ludolph chose to invoke the aid of his Bishop instead.

Other friends and correspondents of Wessel were Jacob Hoeck, Dean of Naeldwick, Bernard of Meppen, John of Amsterdam, Engelbert of Leyden, Gertrude Reyniers of Claræ Aquæ, and another nun whose name we do not know but to whom Wessel addressed a letter which became attached to the treatise on the Eucharist and so was preserved. And to these friends of his maturer years should be added many of the youths in the monasteries and schools which he frequented. They regarded the venerable scholar with a filial reverence which stimulated them to noble living and inspired not a few of them to devote themselves to the tasks of Christian scholarship. Among these two deserve special notice, Agricola and Hegius. The former was a native of Groningen, who after studying at Zwolle and Louvain and Paris and later in Italy became one of the chief instruments in awakening an interest in classical studies among the Germanic peoples. The latter made the school at Deventer, of which for a quarter of a century he was the distinguished president, one of the chief centers of classical learning in northern Europe.

Such were some of the friendships with which Wessel solaced the last decade of his life. Though he was much occupied with teaching and correspondence, yet he gave most of his time to the tasks of authorship. Such writings of his as have been preserved fill a volume of nearly a thousand pages, and those that have perished were apparently not less voluminous. The greater part of these were composed during his residence in the Netherlands. Much time was also occupied in conferences with visitors who came to consult him upon various matters and in journeys from one to another of his three cloister homes. It was a busy and a fruitful life far removed from the violent controversies of the schools and undisturbed by the enemies who had once threatened his destruction.

Never robust in health, he nevertheless retained his faculties unimpaired till near to the appointed limit of threescore years and ten. With his own hand, in a character so fine that it was hardly legible, he wrote the long second letter to Jacob Hoeck; and until his last sickness he made the usual circuit of the convents in which he was such a welcome guest. Fortunately his final illness overtook him while in the cloister at Groningen, where his last hours were cheered by the loving ministries of the nuns whose spiritual father he had been for so many years.

It was not strange that in the weakness of his last days, the specters of the mind, which he had fearlessly faced all his life and had laid in many a fierce combat, should have returned for a time to darken his vision of the truth and obscure his assurance of immortality. That has been the hard experience of some of the world's most blameless souls. But in Wessel's case the lifelong habit of prayer and the practice of simple faith triumphed in the end, and when death came it found him in joyous confidence of immortality. To a friend, to whom on an earlier visit he had confided his conflict with doubt, he said: "I thank God all the vain troublesome thoughts have gone, and I know naught but Jesus Christ and him crucified." These are his last recorded words.

He died on October 4, 1489, being about seventy years of age. His body was buried near the altar in the chancel of the convent chapel. This record of his death appears in the Church registry: "In the year of the Lord, 1489, died the venerable Master Wessel Hermanni, an admirable teacher of sacred theology, well versed in the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew tongues, and acquainted with philosophy in all its branches." For more than a hundred years not even a tablet marked his grave, but in the seventeenth century and again in the eighteenth monuments with suit-

A Corridor in the Convent of the Spiritual Virgins Leading into the Courtyard
It has not been altered since Wessel made the Convent his home

able inscriptions were placed over his resting place. But before these monuments were erected his grave had become to some degree the goal of pilgrimage on the part of his ardent admirers. Hardenberg met two such admirers there in the person of Sagarus, the famous jurist and the councillor of Charles V, and his aged father. The former declared that it was from a worn copy of Wessel's treatise on the Incarnation and the Passion which he carried constantly in his pocket that he had come to know Christ. He thus recounts the incident: "I went with them from Adwerd to the convent of the Spiritual Virgins, where John van Halen, the director, showed us Wessel's skull, which Sagarus reverently embraced and kissed, offering the nuns ten pounds Flemish if he might be permitted to take it with him. But some of the aged superstitious sisters refused, saying that they had once seen books and manuscripts of his burned on suspicion of heresy, and they were afraid that the stranger might be a Lutheran who would use the skull as an object of worship and to practice sorcery!"

After their long repose in the chapel of the cloister Wessel's bones were removed in 1860 to the venerable Church of St. Martin, where they now rest. It happened that members of the American branch of the Gansfort family were at Groningen at the time and witnessed the impressive ceremonies of reinterment.

As all the writings of Wessel that survive were apparently the product of his last years, a list of them may well be given here. One volume of 921 pages, published at Groningen in 1614, contains them all. It has seven divisions, as follows: 1, Concerning Prayer, with an Exposition of the Lord's Prayer. 2, Scala Meditationis, or the Training of Thought and Meditation. 3, Examples of the above dedicated to the monks of Mount Saint Agnes. 4, The Causes of the Incarnation, and

the Magnitude of the Sufferings of our Lord. 5, The Sacrament of the Eucharist. 6, The Farrago, which has six sections or chapters. 7, The Letters.

We have no way of knowing what writings of Wessel were destroyed by the monks who soon after his death seized and burned his literary remains. But the following books also escaped and were still in existence when Hardenberg wrote. They have apparently perished since through accident or neglect. Leaving out of account writings that can only doubtfully be attributed to Wessel, the list of his works that are known to have been lost since the sixteenth century is as follows: 1, Brief Notes on the Bible and on special Passages, on Things Created, Angels, Demons, the Soul, etc. 2, An extended Treatise on Ecclesiastical Dignity and Power, and Indulgences. 3, For the Nominalists, a pamphlet. 4, Christ's Three Days in the Tomb. 5, Two pamphlets on Practical Medicine. 6, A book on the Coming Age. 7, The Mare Magnum, excerpts from many authors.

Both Muurling and Ullmann present extended discussions of the lost and extant works of Wessel with a list of the editions in which the latter still appear.

CHAPTER VII

HIS PERSONALITY

DIFFICULT as it is to trace the events of a life lived so many centuries ago and under circumstances which rendered its contemporary record meager and fragmentary, it is even more difficult to reintegrate the subtle elements that constitute personality. When we seek to ascertain what manner of man Wessel Gansfort was we have to depend mainly upon five sources of information. From his portraits we may judge of his appearance. The external events of his life, so far as they were the results of his own planning, constitute a partial revelation of the man. His writings and recorded sayings afford, perhaps, a clearer expression of his nature. More revealing still are the reactions which his personality occasioned in his contemporaries, the estimates of his friends and his enemies. And most significant of all is the record of his impress upon those with whom he had no direct relations, the proof of his power to transmit his influence through other lives.

Portrait painting was already well developed in the Netherlands in the fifteenth century. Portraits in oil exist of Thomas à Kempis, Rudolph Agricola, and several other Dutch contemporaries of Wessel. It would seem altogether probable that the pictures of Wessel, preserved in engravings, are all derived from a single original, painted from life. Their differences are not too great to be explained by the liberty that the engravers may have

taken with their subject. The best executed of these, which appears as the frontispiece, shows a distinctly individual face and figure. It presents a beardless man of later middle life, attired in a way to suggest the citizen quite as much as the scholar. The plain coat and curious cloth cap appear in the portrait of Thomas à Kempis, and even more strikingly resemble those shown in the "Portrait of a man," a small but masterly painting belonging to the Altman Collection, executed by Dirk Boul, a contemporary of Wessel. The picture of Wessel shows a Germanic ruggedness of feature and an expression unmistakably noble and intellectual. "There is seriousness in the brow, intelligence in the eye, and a degree of roguery about the mouth." It is an interesting face, rendered attractive, in spite of its plainness, by a certain frankness and alertness of expression.

Besides having health that was never robust, Wessel labored under two serious physical limitations. His vision was defective—he was apparently near-sighted—and one of his ankle bones was somewhat deformed so that he walked with a slight limp. But his imperfect sight did not prevent him from leading the life of a student, and when he was an old man he was still able to write long letters in characters so small that younger eyes could scarcely read them. There is no indication that he permitted his delicate health or other physical handicaps to interfere with the carrying out of his purposes; they were simply obstacles to be overcome. Early left an orphan, he made his way through the schools helped by friends who saw his promise; but after he reached Paris there is no indication that he received assistance from anyone. He appears to have supplied his simple wants by private teaching and the practice of medicine, and to have lived in cheerful independence of the patronage of the rich. In this respect he contrasts sharply with

Erasmus, who was constantly bemoaning his poor health and complaining of the bad accommodations of his lodging-places and the niggardliness of his patrons.

Often the possession of some slight physical defect renders a person misanthropic or at least non-social; but this was not the case with Wessel. From his youth he manifested a rare faculty for making friends and an unusual gift of leadership. There must have been something peculiarly winsome in the orphan lad that Mistress Clantes chose to educate along with her son, that Thomas à Kempis honored with his special friendship, that the Brethren at Zwolle entrusted with the position of teacher, and the mature John of Cologne selected as his bosom companion. Genius sometimes isolates its possessors and renders them self-sufficient and impatient with the limitations of their fellows, but nothing is more marked in Wessel than his companionability and his friendly interest in those about him, whether it be his fellow-students in the schools or his companions in the cloister. Yet he did not care to win friends by any adjustment of his convictions or compromise as to conduct. He did not readily fall in with the opinion of the majority nor render intellectual submission to the generally accepted authorities. His mind was so constituted that he naturally challenged many of the positions held by his companions. To some this appeared to be little else than intellectual obstinacy. When a mere student at Zwolle he ventured to differ with Thomas à Kempis on an important matter, and to deliver himself of opinions so unusual that he was called upon to defend them before the officers of the school. At Cologne he chose to neglect the lectures of the university class-rooms and pursue independent lines of study in the libraries of the region. This disposition to think his own thoughts and go his own way marked his whole career, and may explain the fact that, though

for nearly a quarter of a century he frequented various schools, except for the two or three years that he held a professorship at Heidelberg, there is no evidence that he ever had official relations to any of them. If as Hegel contends the progress of thought proceeds by affirmation and denial and the resolution of the resultant contradiction, then Wessel was in at least one important particular temperamentally suited to assist in such progress. He stood ready to challenge, if not deny, many of the accepted doctrines of his day. That this lifelong trait gained him one of his titles is indicated by this passage in a letter from his friend, Jacob Hoeck, written when they were both old men: "I can discern in your letter only one thing which in my opinion is unbecoming a great man, that is, you are of an obstinate disposition and in all that you say aspire to a certain singularity, so that it is generally believed that you are justly called 'The Master of Contradiction.'" In the same letter he refers to Wessel's "hard head," which could not be subdued by the blows of ecclesiastical authority. Yet it would be difficult wholly to establish this charge of intellectual perversity, for it will be recalled that although he went to Paris as an avowed champion of Realism he was led soon after twice to change his philosophic creed; and as his last letters show, he kept an open mind to the very end, courted discussion, and affirmed that he was awaiting further light upon subjects to which he had given lifelong study.

Yet doubtless it was his independence of mind that made him the inspiring teacher that he was. He presented hackneyed subjects in an original and thought-provoking fashion. The boldness of his assertions, the startling character of his paradoxes arrested the attention and stimulated the minds of his hearers. In this respect, as in several other particulars, he provokes comparison

with Abélard. And besides independence and originality of mind, he possessed another gift equally essential to the teacher: clearness of statement and lucidity of explanation. He had so disciplined himself through the study of logic and the discussions of the class-room that the advance of his thought, though sometimes unduly delayed by his concern to make every step perfectly plain, is quite irresistible. It is not difficult to explain his triumphs in the arenas of academic debate. He possessed also a very winning manner in private and public discourse. There was a certain fascination about him so that he held his auditors' attention without apparent effort. It was said by one of his pupils at Adwerd that "the time always passed rapidly when Wessel was speaking, a whole day seemed but a little hour." It must not be supposed that he depended wholly upon the force of his logic to make his point or clinch his argument. In early life he was much disposed to reinforce his syllogisms with a most caustic sarcasm, and this disposition he never wholly overcame, as passages in some of his last letters indicate. Yet his manner mellowed with time and a genial humor came to pervade even his most serious discourse. This characteristic is thus alluded to in the elegy of his admiring friend, Paul Pelantin:

> "The grave and gay in his discourse combined;
> Sober his brow, though smiles lurked round his lips."

That Wessel should have succeeded in interesting the students of his day in the discussion of theological problems was to be expected, for theology still engrossed the intellectual interest of the schools, and all other disciplines were regarded as preparatory thereto; but that he should have been able to inspire young men, and even monks, to an enthusiastic study of the neglected Greek and the

despised Hebrew must be regarded as in the nature of a pedagogical triumph. It was not because he had held chairs of instruction in the universities but because he possessed in a superlative degree the power to awaken and sustain the desire for information and the love of truth that he was always addressed as "Master." His friend, David of Burgundy, expressed current opinion concerning him when he wrote: "I have long known your brilliant gifts as a teacher."

Wessel's mental bent is clearly shown in the career that he chose and the subjects to which he consistently devoted himself. While not without a proper desire to contribute what he might toward the bringing in of the better day that he believed was about to dawn on Church and School, he was singularly free from worldly ambition. There were prizes to be won in the monastic life, but he declined to become a monk. Ordination to the priesthood afforded many privileges, secured many exemptions, and formed the first round of the ecclesiastical ladder at the top of which were such coveted prizes as the cardinal's hat and the throne of St. Peter, but Wessel refused to take the first step toward the priesthood. He refused, also, the first flattering offer of a professorship at Heidelberg, a most desirable position for a young man just entering upon an academic career. He also apparently declined to have any official relation to the University of Paris, where he was a somewhat conspicuous figure for nearly two decades. The story of his choosing copies of the Bible in the original languages, when his friend Pope Sixtus IV offered him any position of honor or emolument within his gift, is thoroughly characteristic of Wessel's disregard for the prizes that excite the desire of the average man. He early chose and consistently followed the career of a scholar, a seeker after truth in the fields of philosophy and religion. He was eager also to teach

what he had learned, provided always that he might be as free to teach as he had been to learn.

It is easy to exaggerate the accomplishments of a man of Wessel's period, for the field of scholarship was still comparatively narrow. That he should have been given the title, "Lux Mundi," by his admiring pupils, or that his contemporaries should have described his learning as encyclopedic, is not necessarily very significant. Much was made of the fact that he was master of the three ancient languages, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; but a hundred years later this would have been regarded as a very ordinary linguistic accomplishment. Wessel was undoubtedly a man of large and varied information, but the limitations of his learning, judged by modern standards, are very marked. It is conceded that as a philologist he was excelled by both his pupils, Reuchlin and Agricola; for his only interest in the Greek and Hebrew languages lay in the fact that they brought him into immediate contact with the thought of the Greek sages and the biblical writers. The assurance that he thus gained he expressed in a reply to one who had quoted the opinion of Thomas Aquinas on some teaching of Aristotle. He dissented from Aquinas' interpretation, saying that Thomas had scarcely seen the shadow of Aristotle while he had communed with him in his native tongue. Wessel's Latin style is free from medieval barbarisms, as might be expected from one who was a Humanist; but as Luther implies in his letter recommending the Farrago, it is quite devoid of classic polish.

In the funeral ode of Paul Pelantin much is made of Wessel's extensive travels, but unless we accept as true the poorly authenticated stories of his visits to Greece and Egypt, there is nothing in his academic wanderings to distinguish him from many another scholar of his day. We may also neglect the statements made con-

cerning his unusual musical accomplishments. But that he had exceptional skill in the practice of medicine is beyond reasonable doubt. His contemporaries give emphatic and detailed testimony in the matter. In the ode with which he was welcomed on his return to Groningen he is called Galen and is represented as bringing the gift of health to his Fatherland. And in the funeral ode, Paul Pelantin, himself a physician, makes extended reference to his exceptional medical skill, and alludes to his patient efforts to enlarge the boundaries of medical knowledge by conducting thousands of experiments. In a passage beginning:

> "The healing art to him Apollo gave,
> Hope he awoke and precious health restored,"

he celebrates his ability to excite expectation of recovery in his patients and his bold experiments in the practice of his art. He relates one such—"one of a thousand"—in which an aged man, nearly dead and given up to die by other physicians, had been restored to life and health by enclosing him in the warm carcass of an ox killed for that purpose. Such a crude experiment probably excited more wonder at that time than do our modern mechanical devices for resuscitation such as the transfusion of blood or the injection of a saline solution into the circulation. Anything that postpones impending death naturally excites popular wonder. A more practical proof of his unusual medical skill is to be found in the fact that men of such prominence as David of Burgundy and Pope Sixtus IV should have sought his services. As has been already noticed, it was apparently by the practice of medicine as well as by private teaching that he supported himself in Paris and during his academic wanderings. By this means also he no doubt rewarded the hospitality

of the nuns of Saint Clara and the monks at Adwerd and Mount Saint Agnes. Still in existence in Hardenberg's time were his treatises upon practical medicine, recording the results of his experiments with dangerous diseases. The destruction of these books is to be regretted, not because it involves any loss to medical practice, but because it deprives those who are writing the history of medicine of data gathered through the experiments of a distinguished medieval physician who was also a philosopher and a theologian.

It is not improbable that Wessel's widely recognized skill as a physician may have heightened his fame in other lines of achievement. Medicine and magic were closely related in the medieval mind, as they are to a considerable degree in the modern. The man whose treatment appeared to cure their sickness, or whose unintelligible technical jargon seemed to explain their death, was regarded by the common people with something akin to awe. Even in the next century Paracelsus was able to prey upon popular superstition regarding the physician's art and persuade many that he was assisted by supernatural agencies. It is not without significance that while the title, Doctor, the man who has learned and hence is able to teach, has always in academic circles its proper qualification of Law or Medicine or Letters as the case may be, in popular usage, the word Doctor connotes the physician. The man who cures or at least attempts to cure their bodily ills is still to most people the Doctor, *par excellence*, the learned man!

While Wessel must be thought of as a Humanist, one interested in the life and literature of the classic age, yet he is first and always a Christian Humanist. His acquaintance with the ancient languages and sages was acquired as a means to his completer understanding of the early Christian literature and the philosophical systems with

which Christian theology early formed an alliance. He did not study the ancient languages for their own sake, but for the light they cast upon the mystery of life, or the contribution they might make to theological truth. This fact is hinted in a letter written to him by Alexander Hegius, one of his pupils, who says: "As to my studies, I am following your advice, for any literature whose study involves the loss of one's rectitude is pernicious." Wessel's pages are strewn with citations from or allusions to Greek and Latin authors, secular and religious. Unquestionably, he was widely read in such classic and patristic writings as were accessible to the scholars of his day. He had visited many libraries, and in his later days some of his students were interested to bring to his attention any rare books that they might discover.

As a Humanist with strong mystical tendencies, Wessel was naturally disposed to disparage the method and matter of the scholastic writers. More or less acquaintance with them was the common possession of the theologians of his day, but he found in them little to admire. "Theological wranglers" he contemptuously called some of them. The greatest of them, such as Thomas Aquinas, he frequently quotes, but often to disapprove. Yet he was not lacking in appreciation of the value of the logical method of the scholastics as a discipline in sharpness of definition and exactness of statement. In a letter to Ludolph van Veen he laments that their common friend, John of Wesel, then being tried for heresy, had not received a thorough training in the scholastic method, which he believed would have saved him from many of his difficulties.

While, as has been said, the writings of Wessel give evidence of his wide reading in the Schoolmen and the Fathers and to a less degree in the Greek and Latin classics, yet it was not with these but with the Scriptures

that his mind was saturated. The words and phrases of the Vulgate often form the matrix in which his own thought is cast. It is from the Scriptures that most of his citations are made. Not infrequently there are as many as a half-dozen upon a single page. Those from the New Testament naturally predominate: among those from the Old Testament, passages from the Psalms, interpreted in a Christian sense, are the most frequent. Muurling has thus grouped the writers from whom Wessel quotes most largely: among ancient secular writers, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander, Proclus, Homer, Demosthenes, Cicero, Vergil, Gellius, Valerius; among the Church Fathers, Origen, Gregory Nazianzen, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine; among later writers, Thomas Aquinas, Scotus, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter d'Ailly, and Gerson. "Many other names occur again and again" he adds, calling attention also to Wessel's acquaintance with the Talmud and the Koran. Raymond Lull is among the many almost forgotten writers from whom he quotes. He evidently was familiar with his philosophical writings, and it would appear that his oft-quoted aphorism, "To love is to live," had been borrowed from this first martyr missionary to the Moslems.

Though the scientific spirit was beginning to assert itself, the age in which Wessel lived abounded in superstitions of many sorts, the offspring of earlier ignorance. Thomas Aquinas had given a qualified approval of astrology, and most of the popes consulted astrologers before beginning any important undertaking. Savonarola declared in a sermon, "There is no prelate or great lord that hath not intimate dealings with some astrologer who fixeth the hour at which he is to ride out or undertake some piece of business." Even Peter d'Ailly, Chancellor of the University of Paris and a man of the most liberal culture, could not wholly free himself from this form of superstí-

tion; and Luther, who belongs to the next century, may be said to have accepted most of the superstitions of his day and believed in witchcraft and magic and astrology and in demonic agency in storms and pestilence. It is therefore an evidence of the unusual strength and independence of Wessel's mind that he should have risen above the common superstitions of his day. Astrology apparently has no place whatever in his thought, and as for belief in ghosts and visions and phenomena of that sort, which were generally accepted as part and parcel of the Christian faith, he discourages it as disproven by Pythagoras, as contrary to the Scriptures, and as subversive of the best Christian living. To the nun, Gertrude Reyniers, who had questioned him concerning some current stories of ghosts, he wrote: "If most of these tales of revelations and visions are not tempered with a large grain of salt, I regard them as both illusory and dangerous." He saw the peril in obscuring the outlines of the great truths of Christianity by involving them in a cloud of superstition or of identifying the Christian faith with an unbiblical and irrational supernaturalism. He shrank from the idea of any influence of the departed spirits upon us, or of our influence upon them. For that reason he discouraged masses and prayers for the dead, and left request that none should be said on his behalf. This is representative of his attitude of mind; he was naturally critical, and in a noble sense, rationalistic. This rendered him impatient, not only with the superstitions of the priests and the monks and the literature of the marvelous that nourished them, but even more with the practices upon the common people made possible by these superstitions. It was his attack upon these things that excited the enmity of the priests who made it unsafe for him in Paris, and the wrath of the Mendicant Friars who after his death wreaked upon his writings the

vengeance they were prevented from inflicting upon their author.

No doubt Wessel's critical attitude gave him the appearance, especially in his younger days, of being skeptical and perhaps conceited. Obedience to authority in matters of belief was commonly regarded as one of the foremost Christian virtues. A man who set question-marks after the dicta of the most venerated Schoolmen and challenged some of the time-honored customs of the Church was certain to become the object of suspicion. Unquestionably, his disposition to dissent from the statements of his teachers and perplex them with paradoxes tended to make him *persona non grata* in the schools that he attended. But whatever intellectual pride may have disfigured his youth, his later years were marked by a noble humility of spirit. Shortly before his death he wrote to his friend, Jacob Hoeck: "I acknowledge that in some of the assertions that I make I am looked upon as singular. I often suspect myself of singularity, and therefore fear that I frequently fall into error. If you could look into my heart you would see there, I am sure, not pride but humility and contrition, since I often pray that I may not, as the penalty of my stubbornness, fall into damnable error. I am always willing to be set right, not only by men of learning and experience like yourself, but by anyone however humble." Certainly, the impression made by Wessel's writings is not that of the arrogance of dogmatic certainty which regards the evidence as all in and the case closed, but rather that of open-mindedness and patient search for the truth.

This intellectual modesty finds its counterpart in Wessel's religious humility. Although he had lived, so far as is known, a blameless life of unselfish service, and was regarded by those who knew him intimately in his

later years as a man of saintly character, yet in the spirit of Saint Paul he utterly disclaimed any unusual spiritual attainment. He did not conceive of Christianity as a legal system whose requirements he could fully meet or exceed. There was no room in his thought for works of supererogation. To him our Lord's injunction, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect," made all religious self-complacency impossible. In one of his devotional writings he says: "Jesus desires to see in man the divine image in truth and purity and love restored by himself. In so far as these do not lie within us, darkness dwells in our hearts." With such an ideal before him he could say of the graces of the Christian life as he said of the attainments of the scholar: "I grow old, but I remain always a learner." He was accustomed to remark that "the man who as the result of the reading of the Bible does not come to think less and less of his moral attainments, not only reads in vain, but reads to his peril."

The Church's mediation of divine grace, a cardinal doctrine of his age, had very little place in Wessel's thought. He conceived of the Christian's relations to God in the personal terms in which they are presented in the New Testament, and constantly refers to our Lord's dealings with his disciples and others as illustrating his relations to us. This was doubtless due to his early training in the schools of the Brethren, his natural tendency to mysticism, and his lifelong study of the Scriptures. His constant emphasis upon love to God as the one essential thing in the Christian life has led some to characterize his religious temper as distinctly Johannine, in an age in which legalism was the dominant religious spirit. He says repeatedly that "love is life," and that the perfection of our love of God will constitute the bliss of heaven. "Only in love is life, and only in a holy love is a holy life.

We must love our Elder Brother and be brought back by him to the Father of Love." It is interesting to notice that in thus emphasizing love to God as the essential thing in religion, he involves love to our neighbor. He affirms that we cannot love Christ except as we love those whom he loves.

The breadth of Wessel's religious sympathy is one of the striking things in his character. This appears most clearly in his treatise on the Communion of the Saints. He counts as fellow-members of the household of faith not only the adherents of all branches of the Church, but those who though they might belong to no Church were in harmony with the spirit of Christ. He adopts the Psalmist's statement: "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." It is a man's attitude toward God, not his relation to some religious institution, that for him constitutes the basis of religious fellowship. And inasmuch as this attitude may be changed by the influences of the future life, Wessel regarded with sympathetic hopefulness the prospect of those who in this life had not been brought into reconciliation with God. He had pondered much upon the future, and had practiced, as we would express it, the life eternal. His anticipation of it is sometimes expressed in words that suggest the ardors of Bernard of Cluny. Death is the transit from the present dim lamplight into the brightening dawn of God's presence. It returns the exile to his own country. It ushers the bride into the marriage chamber. The bliss of the heavenly life will consist, he believed, in the full possession of the truth, in union with God through purified love, and in increasing moral assimilation to the divine likeness. He had become eager to make the great venture, and his last words of humble reliance upon Christ express the faith in which he greeted the unseen.

CHAPTER VIII

WESSEL AS A PROTESTANT

THERE is a certain anomaly involved, in applying the word Protestant to a man who belongs to the century before the Reformation, and who lived and died in full fellowship with the Roman Catholic Church. Yet protest and reform have been constantly recurring phenomena in the Church's life. It would not be difficult to form a list of her leaders reaching from the Apostolic age to our own to whom the term Protestant might properly be applied. They were men who dissented from things as they were, pointed out the better way, and became at once the disturbers and the benefactors of the Church. Among Protestants, in this more general sense, Wessel unquestionably deserves a place.

But should we apply to him the term Protestant in its restricted and partisan sense? Facts like the following would seem quite conclusive. Wessel assailed the abuses in Church administration against which the Reformers aimed their attacks. He stressed doctrines which they restored to their original prominence. He put the same emphasis that they did upon the Scriptures, as the supreme authority in faith and conduct. His conception of the Church and of the relation of the individual to Christ reveals a type of thought and experience common to the Reformers. In his view of the sacraments he anticipated that of the most radical of the Reformers.

Hence it was to be expected that the Reformers would

The Church of St. Martin, Groningen, in which the Bones of Wessel Gansfort now Rest

claim Wessel as a kindred spirit. Luther, who did not make the acquaintance of Wessel's writings till about 1520, (when he had already taken his characteristic positions,) said that if he had made their acquaintance earlier, his enemies might have accused him of having taken most of his ideas from them. That other German and Swiss and Dutch Reformers were strongly influenced by Wessel in the formation of their theological views and claimed him as their spiritual father we have abundant evidence. Even Erasmus affirmed that Wessel had taught all that Luther was teaching, only in a much less violent and offensive manner. That the Reformers should thus have claimed discipleship to Wessel and concerned themselves in the publication of his writings is quite decisive. It may be safely assumed that they could be trusted to distinguish a friend from a foe.

It is significant that the Reformers' view of Wessel was confirmed by contemporary Roman Catholic opinion. He was regarded by many of the theologians of his day as "heretical," in the same sense in which that term was later applied to the Protestant leaders. His views rendered it unsafe for him to remain in Paris, and made the members of the theological faculty at Heidelberg unwilling to accept him as a colleague. The Inquisitors at Cologne, who had reduced his friend John of Wesel to submission, were planning to attack him when he escaped to the diocese of his friend, the powerful Bishop of Utrecht. After his death, the same hostility was directed toward his writings. The Mendicant Friars, the champions of conservatism in theology, endeavored to burn them all. Those that survived were apparently circulated with great caution. Luther complains of the ill fortune which had prevented Wessel's writings from having had a wider reading. And even after his Farrago had been given publicity through the press, there were hostile agencies

at work to hinder its circulation. Quite different, however, from the attempted destruction of his writings by fanatical monks and the unofficial obstruction of their circulation was their formal and official condemnation in 1529 by being placed on the Index of Prohibited Books and the later decision of the Fathers of the Council of Trent that they deserved to rank in the first class of books thus condemned.

It is perhaps not strange that Roman Catholic writers are, in the main, reluctant to admit that a man of such distinction as Wessel, an intimate friend of the pope and others high in ecclesiastical position, was a spiritual ancestor of the Reformers and an advocate of the doctrines and policies that the Church condemned at Trent and still condemns. The contrary conclusions reached by modern Catholic and Protestant scholars as to the proper classification of Wessel indicate how much more influential partisan prejudice is than the much vaunted "scientific method" claimed by both parties. It is somewhat disconcerting to compare the article on Wessel in the Catholic Encyclopedia with that in the New Schaff-Herzog, or the conclusions of Denifle with those of Harnack. However, the more modern Catholic writers are disposed to make important concessions to their Protestant opponents, and it seems probable that Wessel's spiritual affiliation with the Reformers will ultimately be recognized by all parties.

The two great doctrines from which the Reformation derived its distinctly religious character were justification by faith and the supreme authority of the Scriptures. They have been described as "the material and formal principles" of the Reformation. They naturally form the touchstone for the determination of a man's relation to Protestantism. As to Wessel's position regarding the first of these principles there can be no doubt. He

affirms it repeatedly in Pauline terms. And not only does he state unequivocally that it is faith and faith alone that restores a man to reconciliation with God, but he dismisses or neglects all the devices by which the medieval theologians had induced the penitent to purchase the mediation of the Church. A characteristic example of the way in which he states the doctrine of justification by faith, both negatively and positively, is afforded in chapters 45 and 47 of the treatise on the Magnitude of the Sufferings of Christ, in which he says: "Whoever believes that he shall be justified by his own works does not know what righteousness is. For to be righteous is to give to everyone his due, but who has ever been able to render his full duty to God or indeed to man? A person who imagines that he has, possesses no conception of the magnitude of the blessedness of the future, to which no works of his can ever entitle him." A representative positive statement of the doctrine is the following: "To everyone who believes, Christ is the end and fruit of the law for righteousness, because it is he that gives to all that believe in his name the power to become sons of God. By faith in the Word they connect themselves with the Word. The Word is God with whom faith thus connects them. But it is good to be thus connected with God, because whoever is so connected becomes one spirit with Him, righteous with the Righteous One, holy with the Holy."

It should be noticed, however, that by faith Wessel means more than intellectual assent; in his conception it involves love and obedience and self-commitment. With justification God gives his Spirit, thereby infusing in the believer the beginnings of love and obedience; these will grow as faith itself grows. "In unbelievers their lack of faith separates them from life, but he that believeth on Christ hath eternal life. Our good deeds nourish

and strengthen our faith, but they do not give life. They merely strengthen the bond of life, that is, faith. Only Christ and the Spirit give life; only Christ's sacrifice sanctifies us." This progress in faith through obedience is likened to the stages in life. "Faith is first a child; next when it is equipped with hope and gains a higher confidence it becomes a maiden; finally it is converted into love, when the believer disdains every other affection save that which is fixed upon the highest object."

With such a conception of faith, as a vital principle in a man's life, the bond of an increasing fellowship with God, it was not difficult for Wessel to resolve into a mere difference of standpoint the apparent contradiction of Paul and James as to the relative value of faith and works. Both apostles believe that it is faith that justifies, but James insists that it must be a genuine living faith that manifests its life by its deeds. But it is in works and not by works that faith lives, just as it is by its deeds that the body shows itself to be alive; if these were lacking it would be regarded as dead. So the soul, if it discharge none of the functions of life, must be regarded as dead. But of all the functions of the soul love is the highest, hence love—even though like that of Mary it sits with folded hands—is the highest proof of the existence of spiritual life. "Love is preferred above all duty and service; but as love is the offspring of faith, faith is acceptable not for its own sake alone but also for that of its offspring."

It is at this point that Wessel combines the central teaching of John with that of Paul, making of faith and love the two foci about which all his teachings concerning salvation are grouped. In this also we see the combination of the two elements which are characteristic of the best type of Reformation doctrine. Here the products of Humanism and Mysticism coalesce; the former in its emphasis on the historical and objective, on what Christ

wrought for us to be apprehended by faith; the latter with its necessary supplement in what Christ works in us, evoking our love and thus uniting us vitally to Himself. Wessel sets forth the relation of faith to love in terms of generation. God's love for us as revealed in Christ begets our faith in Him. But faith necessarily includes reciprocal love and service. And from the union of God's love to us with the love thereby evoked in our hearts proceed all the graces of the Christian character and all the activities of the Christian life. The essence of the divine nature is love, and we share the divine life as we exercise love. With a reiteration as constant as that of Browning, Wessel asserts that "love is life," and further affirms that an increasing love to God brings about a species of deification not unlike that which Irenæus taught was to be the goal of Christian development.

But Wessel's repeated declarations that faith, in this sense, is the sole ground of a man's justification are strongly reinforced by his constant disparagement of the means by which the medieval Church made reconciliation with God seem, in large part, something to be merited by good deeds or penitential suffering or to be obtained through the good offices of the pope or the priest. Because in ministering God's grace to men the Church had partly obscured the fact that it was grace and not reward, Wessel cut the foundation from under the Church's penitential system, belittled the value of confession, endowment of masses, repetition of prayers, pilgrimages, celibacy, and asceticism in general. These "good works," which formed so conspicuous a part of the life of the medieval Church, had, he declared, nothing in them to merit salvation. They were not even the proper proofs of faith, which were to be found in love to God and to our fellow-men.

In his teaching concerning the authority of Scripture

Wessel states his own personal experience rather than an abstract theological principle. In the schools of the Brethren he had early learned to read and love the Bible; later, he had given many years to the study of the current philosophical and theological systems. He had seen the effect upon the Church of neglecting the Bible and accepting the dicta of councils and popes as the final authority in religion and morals. In the meantime he had acquired a knowledge of the original languages of the Bible and of the history of the Church. He knew what the Scriptures taught and wherein the Church had departed from its original faith and standards of life. Upon this knowledge he based his own faith and nourished his religious life. And he had come to the conviction that the only path for the Church's return to her former faith and piety was that which he had himself taken. The New Testament must be made the norm of religious thinking and conduct; all that was taught or enjoined contrary to it must be rejected. The medieval theologians held that the Scriptures were inspired, but that the Spirit of God also directed the councils of the Church and spoke through her prelates, especially the pope. Their official utterances in creeds and legislation and judicial decisions of various sorts came to constitute the laws of the Church—presumably in harmony with the Scriptures and popularly believed to be an interpretation of the principles of the New Testament suited to the altered needs of the Church. Unbiased readers of the New Testament, however, could not but discover many points at which the laws and customs of the Church were at variance with the Gospel and the usages of Apostolic times; for the legislation of the popes was often more influenced by the exigencies of the situation than by the principles laid down in the New Testament. Yet after the eleventh century they did not hesitate to claim divine authority for their official utterances.

They were the vicegerents of Christ, and whoever ventured to disobey them did so at the peril of his soul. It is true that the Reforming Councils of Wessel's century, which deposed and condemned popes and reannounced the principle that an Ecumenical Council was the highest authority in the Church, had somewhat lessened papal prestige, but they had not greatly increased the authority of the Scriptures.

Such were the circumstances under which Wessel attempted to give to the neglected Bible—discredited somewhat because of heretical movements based upon its unskilled interpretation—the place of supreme religious authority. The difficulty of the undertaking becomes the more apparent when we recall that the work of Erasmus and Reuchlin had not yet been done, the printing-press was just coming into use, and the united influence of the clergy and the monks was arrayed against this seemingly dangerous innovation. Since the popes were making extravagant claims for their authority, it was perhaps inevitable that Wessel should make similar claims for that of the Scriptures. Absolute authority in a man could only be met by absolute authority in a book. It was inconsistent with his theory that the Eternal Word was but imperfectly expressed either in Creation or in the Scriptures, but he nevertheless took the ground, which the Protestant Church of the next century felt compelled to take, that the Bible, as a whole, is an infallible revelation of God. Wessel, however, recognized the great difference between the value of the Old Testament and that of the New, though, he contended that both were free from error of any kind. "All Scripture," he writes in one of his letters, "is a connected whole, whose several parts must necessarily be inspired by the Holy Spirit and true; for the whole cannot be true if even the smallest part be false!" Thus early was the argument for the authority

of the Bible constructed in the form of an inverted pyramid, whose unstable equilibrium was to be the occasion of constant anxiety to Protestant theologians.

Wessel, however, was not blind to the value of the Church's traditions as supplementing the New Testament record. Nor was he indifferent to the testimony of the Fathers, or to the decisions of councils, or to the utterances of the popes. These he believed had practical utility, if they were tested by the Scriptures and followed only so far as they were in obvious agreement with them. "Those who sit in Moses' seat are to be honored and obeyed only so far as their teachings accord with those of Moses. It is only when the clergy and Doctors agree with the true and sole Teacher and lead us to Him that we ought to listen to them." On the critical question as to whether the Gospel is to be accepted on the authority of the Church or the Church on the authority of the Gospel, Wessel thus states his position: "It is for God's sake that we believe the Gospel, and it is for the Gospel's sake that we believe the Church and the pope. We do not believe the Gospel for the Church's sake." He so interprets Augustine's famous utterance on the subject as to make it accord with his own conviction. In his letter to Engelbert, replying to the statement that the Church is governed by the Holy Spirit, he writes: "Yes, but only in so far as the Church is holy and exercises its saving power, not, however, when it is ignorant or in error as, alas, it often is." Elsewhere he says: "We believe in God, speaking by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, not in the Catholic Church, not in the Latin Councils, not in the pope."

Citations might be multiplied illustrating, from different standpoints, the authority which Wessel attributed to the Scriptures. In his letter to Jacob Hoeck, who had reminded him that he ought to obey the pope rather than follow his own reason, he writes: "What is reason to me

in these matters? Is it not the Holy Scriptures?" This implies that to him the Scriptures were the norm of religious judgment or conscience. He freely admits, however, that as an authority the Scriptures require careful interpretation. A layman, nevertheless, may appeal to them as against the decision of a Church council. But one must not content himself with the superficial meaning of Scripture; he must compare Scripture with Scripture, avoid distorting its meaning, and give due weight to the objections of his opponents. The opinion of an expert in biblical interpretation is to be preferred to that of an inexpert prelate. Yet it is the spirit of love rather than mere zeal for knowledge that aids most in arriving at the truth. At present, he says, "it is the dense forest of decrees and decretals that, by its very complexity, makes the study and knowledge of the Scriptures impossible."

No less distinctly Protestant is Wessel's conception of the Church. The medieval Roman Catholic thought of the Church as a visible institution, always and everywhere the same, deriving its unity from its relation to one person, the Vicegerent of Christ on earth. Its membership was strictly limited to those who accept its doctrines, obey its authority, and receive its sacraments. Other Christians might exist outside its bounds, but they were either heretical or schismatic, and so formed no part of the Catholic Church. Wessel opposed to this objective and institutional notion of the Church a conception more subjective and spiritual. In his thought it is not the pope but Christ who gives unity to the Church. It is not certain relations to an institution, but a certain attitude to Christ that constitutes a man a member of the Church. National boundaries and lack of ecclesiastical associations offer no obstacle to such membership. The Catholic Church embraces all true followers of Jesus

Christ in all parts of the world. It is substantially what we mean by the phrase, "the Church Universal." The passage in the treatise on The Sacrament of Penance and the Keys of the Church is so characteristic that it may well be given at some length. "The common belief in the absolute rule of the Roman pontiff is untenable in view of the fact that it is impossible for one man to know the territory of the whole earth, which has never been entirely included in the works of any cosmographer. For how shall he judge those whom he cannot know? How shall he judge the faith of a man whose language he is not acquainted with? Hence we reach the conclusion that the Holy Spirit has kept for Himself the task of encouraging, quickening, preserving, and increasing the unity of the Church. He has not left it to a Roman pontiff who often pays no attention to it. We ought to acknowledge one Catholic Church, yet to acknowledge its unity as the unity of the faith and of the Head, the unity of the corner-stone, not the unity of its director, Peter, or his successor. For what could Peter in Italy do for those in India endangered by temptation or persecution except pray for them, even though he had greater power than his successors? Or what could be done during the fiercest persecution against the teachers of error in different parts of the world? What decrees or General Councils were able to hold the Church together even in external unity? Hence it is only the internal unity of its one essential Head that is implied in the words of the Apostles' Creed. For to-day in accordance with the very word of the Lord the testimony of the Gospel has been received even at the ends of the earth, and Christians are actually to be found beyond the Hyperboreans, beyond the Indians and Scythians, beyond the Ethiopians, beyond the Tropic of Capricorn! To these Christians widely separated in land and tongue no decrees of a Roman pontiff or of our

General Councils of Constance or Basel can be known by any human means. And, nevertheless, they together with us constitute one Catholic and Apostolic Church in the oneness of faith, piety, and true love, even if they do not know that there is a Rome or a Roman pontiff."

Closely related to this idea of the Church and necessitated by it is his conception of the communion of the saints. It is nothing less than the spiritual fellowship that exists between those of all climes and ages who have become sons of God by the exercise of a common faith and hope and love. They constitute a spiritual brotherhood in which each shares in the others' virtues and blessings. This communion is not interrupted by the quarrels or the heresies of the prelates, nor can any true believer be excluded therefrom by the decree of the pope. "All the saints share in a true and essential unity, even as many as unitedly hold fast to Christ in one faith and hope and love. It matters not under what prelates they may live, or how ambitiously these prelates may dispute or disagree or wander from the truth or even become heretical. It matters not what distances in space or intervals or years may separate them. It is of this fellowship that we say in the Creed: 'I believe in the communion of the saints.' Hence all our forefathers have shared in it with us, being baptized with the same baptism, refreshed with the same spiritual food, and revived by the same spiritual rock as ourselves. This unity and fellowship of the saints is in nowise destroyed by differences or advanced by agreement among those who rule them, for neither the impiety or even heresy of their rulers can injure godly men. On the other hand, it is acknowledged that a truly pious Greek at Constantinople, subject to his schismatic patriarch, may possibly believe everything that a Latin at Rome believes. How then does the heretical perversion of his rulers harm him? The unity of

the Church under one pope is, therefore, merely accidental. Though it may contribute much to the communion of the saints, it is not essential to it."

Wessel taught also the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. That there was no official clergy in the Apostolic Church, and that every Christian had equally direct access to God are facts that lie upon the surface of the earliest Christian records. But gradually the lay officers of the early Church, influenced by Jewish and pagan precedent, began to assume sacerdotal functions; and after the second century this hierarchical tendency developed rapidly. Long before Wessel's time the conception of the priesthood of all believers had almost disappeared from the thought of the Church, the Mystics alone emphasizing it. To this development Cyprian, at the middle of the third century, had given a great impulse by insisting that "no man can have God as his father who has not the Church as his mother." With this idea that an institution must intervene between the individual soul and God Wessel had no sympathy whatever. This comes out clearly in his teaching concerning justification, in his conception of the sacraments, in his denial of the Church's right to impose penance, in his contention for the right of individual interpretation of Scripture, and in his constant reference to Christ's intimate relations to his followers as illustrating those which the Christian may still sustain to him. In the treatise on the Sacrament of Penance occurs this significant passage: "There is a double priesthood. The one is a matter of rank and is sacramentally communicated. The other is inherent in our rational nature and so is common to all men. The second is sufficient without the first, but without the second the first involves guilt. The second by itself imparts grace. By it Saint Anthony excelled many bishops, and a tanner excelled Saint Anthony.

The Apostles were consecrated and anointed by the Holy Spirit, since the Holy Spirit is the ointment which Christ earned for us by his death. Therefore we have all been baptized and anointed by the death of Christ and the Holy Spirit. We find that Christ consecrated both the Apostles and his other disciples, since they all received the ointment of the Holy Spirit." That Wessel believed that each Christian possessed immediate access to God is evident, not only from such statements as the one above, and from his frequent reference to desert saints who achieved their sanctity without priestly aid, but also from the discussion on the Passion of our Lord, where concerning our appropriation of the burnt offering of our High Priest, he affirms: "All power in heaven and earth is given to him, whoever he may be, who wished to be his minister. But every son of God ministers to him as to the first-born."

Holding this conception of the universal priesthood of believers, it was inevitable that Wessel should have set radical limitations upon the powers and prerogatives of the hierarchy. According to the more generally accepted theory of the times, all the authority possessed by the priesthood converged upon the occupant of Saint Peter's chair, and all the light of the Spirit's illumination of the Church came to a focus in him and found unerring expression in his official utterances. He was the Church's High Priest, mediating God's grace to the faithful. He was also the Church's ruler, in whom all the functions of government coalesced. Wessel has not much to say in direct criticism of the parish priesthood, but what he says concerning the pope and the prelates applies by clear implication to all those belonging to the hieratic system. Their only true service, he insists, is pastoral. They are undershepherds of God's flock. They are physicians of the soul, ministering to the sin-sick. They have no

authority over those they serve other than what is necessary "for such a peaceable and inoffensive association of the sons of God with each other as may be effected by the prudence and care of frail man, when assisted by God." All assumptions of authority, all interventions between the individual believer and God, all attempts to lord it over God's heritage are in the nature of usurpations. The proper functions of the pope are the same as those of the priest. He should preach the gospel, conduct public worship, perform the sacraments, warn, counsel, persuade, and comfort his fellow Christians, and maintain peace and order in the Church. When he exceeds these ministries, he invades the rights of the individual son of God and assumes powers which God alone can exercise.

Wessel did not advocate the overthrow of the papacy, nor did any of the Reformers at the first. They came to that only when convinced by experience that it could not be enlisted in the cause of reform. Wessel enjoins reverence and love and obedience to good popes and prelates. His attitude in this matter resembles that of Erasmus, who was eager to improve but had no thought of destroying the historic ecclesiastical structure. He was conscious of the grave defects in the administration of the Church and criticized severely the character and the policies of the prelates of his day. He does not spare even his former friend, Sixtus IV, whose nepotism and political intrigues invited censure. But while lamenting the corrupt and tyrannical administration of the Church, he comforted himself with the assurance that God's grace is so great and the influence of His Spirit upon His children so strong that unjust rulers and corrupt prelates cannot wholly ruin the Church.

Nevertheless, the Church should not acquiesce in its mismanagement by the clergy, since the corruption of the

prelates is due in part to the carelessness and folly of the Church, even as bad secular rulers are God's punishment of the sins of their subjects. If the people were to insist upon a better administration of the Church they could secure it. It is their duty to oppose and remove evil prelates. Those who ruin the Church should be resisted by all Christians, even the humblest, even by peasants, according to the statement of Jerome that "however much a pious peasantry may build up the Church of God by the excellency of their lives, they harm it quite as much if they do not resist those that are destroying it." The relation of people to their priests is that of voluntary compact, it is like the relation that exists between patients and their physician. They need not tolerate the corrupt or negligent. The annual election of their superiors by some of the mendicant orders affords a suggestion of the way to rid the Church of unacceptable prelates. In fact, Wessel would apply the principle of the recall even to secular rulers! Its application to the pope is in a form so picturesque as to warrant its quotation in full. It appears, not in his treatise on Ecclesiastical Dignity and Power in which his view of the proper functions of the priesthood is more fully elaborated, but in his discussion of the Keys of the Church, and is as follows: "Men who are sailing amid storms and tempests with an experienced but worn-out pilot may oppose him, but in the end they ought to obey him. But, on the other hand, if the pilot is drunken or falls asleep and lets go his hold of the helm and allows the ship to be driven and tossed hither and thither; then others, who are skilled in seamanship, not only may cast him aside and take the helm, but they ought to do so, having regard not for their own safety only but for that of their companions in the ship. So should it be in Peter's boat!" Wessel doubtless had in mind the deposition of the popes by the Reforming Coun-

cils, since he frequently refers to the pontiffs thus deposed as examples of papal corruption.

Wessel's conception of the priesthood, namely, that it is wholly pastoral and exists only for the edification of the Church, led him to set sharp limits to obedience to priestly or papal commands. "The canons and statutes of prelates have no more authority than they contain wisdom." The opinion of a wise layman is to be preferred to that of an ill-informed or corrupt pope, and it is the task of the true theologian to determine what commands of a pontiff are obligatory. As to the power to "bind and loose" and "the gift of the keys," these amount to nothing more than Christ's endowment of his followers with the ministry of the Gospel and the gift of the Holy Spirit. By the proclamation of the Gospel they release believers from their sins, and open the door of the kingdom to them. It may be admitted that in a certain sense the pope is the successor of Saint Peter, but like Saint Peter he is subject to error and may need correction. He has no judicial authority whatsoever, and no power to teach or command beyond the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel. He no more possesses the keys of the kingdom than does any other person endowed with the Gospel and the Holy Spirit.

In his conception of the sacraments, also, Wessel was distinctly Protestant. Here as elsewhere his views were based on the New Testament and the usages of the early Church. Though he was aware that the sacramental system of his day was of somewhat recent development, he was not disposed to abolish the ceremonies that lent impressiveness to these solemn transactions of the Church. He would, however, confine their significance to that which they possessed in the primitive Church. They were not devices for the automatic transmission of spiritual benefits. They are means of grace, like the Gospel itself, and

their benefit to the recipient depends wholly upon his attitude of receptivity. In the form in which they were celebrated in the Church they were by no means the *sine qua non* to a robust Christian life—witness the desert saints and others inaccessible to the Church. It is even implied that there may be a valid celebration of the sacraments which, like that of the Friends, is purely spiritual. "He who believes feeds upon the body of Christ, even though it be nowhere externally offered to him." Statements like this were apparently the result of a strong reaction from the Schoolmen's emphasis upon what might be called the automatic mechanism of the sacraments.

The tendency of Wessel's teachings concerning the Eucharist is clearly seen in the position taken by two of his disciples, Cornelius Honius and Zwingli. The former, who endured long imprisonment as a result of his advocacy of evangelical doctrines, wrote a treatise on the Eucharist in which he states that when our Lord, in the institution of the sacrament, said, "This is my body," he meant: This signifies my body. Though many of Wessel's statements imply this interpretation, Honius was the first to state it explicitly. Zwingli apparently formed his memorial theory of the Eucharist as a result of his reading of Wessel's long devotional treatise on that subject, which came into his hands about 1520, when his religious ideas were still plastic. The conception there presented was one that commended itself to the noble rationalism which was such a marked characteristic of the Swiss Reformer.

Wessel's dissent from current teaching concerning the sacrament of penance was no less radical. He denied that the priest in the confessional possessed any judicial authority whatever. The imposition of penance as a condition of the penitent's absolution not only obscured

the free gift of divine forgiveness, but it caused the penitent sorrow when God intended that he should have joy. Oral confession may have value in bringing one to a clearer recognition of his sins, but it is not essential to repentance or to forgiveness. As for satisfaction for sin rendered by doing penance, the only "works meet for repentance" are love and joy and gratitude. God forgets our forgiven sins and desires us to do the same. The father in the parable sought to blot out his son's memory of his life in the far country by the warmth of his welcome. He would not listen to his confession. With this denial of the validity of the whole penitential system, Wessel cut the foundation from under the custom of granting indulgences, which he attacked in a much more radical fashion than did Luther in his famous theses. These assailed the abuses of indulgences, Wessel attacked the entire system of indulgences as lacking warrant in the Scriptures or the usages of the early Church and as injurious to Christian morality.

In many lesser matters also, Wessel assumed what is now accepted as the Protestant position. He dismissed the idea of Purgatory as a place of suffering and substituted for it a Paradise, in which the redeemed though imperfect soul is purified through increasing knowledge and love of Christ. It is a place also of hope for the heathen world, since here Christ himself presents the eternal Gospel. Though at different periods Wessel had close relations with those prominent in monastic life and spent his last days in cloisters, yet he consistently denied the special sanctity of the celibate life. Virgin purity might, he affirmed, dwell in the devout heart of a Queen Mother as well as in that of a nun. Abraham's vocation as the founder of a race was no less sacred than that of John the Baptist. This was a most radical position, for the monastic ideal of holiness had dominated

the clergy and the Church for five hundred years. The conspicuous features of the popular religious life of the medieval Church such as the observance of special days, devotions at certain shrines, pilgrimages, prayers to certain saints, the use of the crucifix, the rosary, etc.—these have no place in Wessel's thought. That he did not use a rosary or any other mechanical aid to prayer, and that he left requests that there should be no masses or prayers said for the repose of his soul, are indications of his complete emancipation from the common religious customs of his day. He venerated the memory of the Blessed Virgin, as he had been taught years before by Thomas à Kempis, but the worship of the saints and the special cults of the Church made no appeal to him. His religious life was enriched by the ministries of the Church, but he drew his instruction directly from the Word of God, and found his joy and inspiration in immediate communion with Christ.

Even more significant was what might be called Wessel's Protestant attitude of mind. He resented human authority in matters of faith, and human mediation in the great transactions of the soul with God. With him religion was individual rather than institutional. It was the result of a man's attitude toward God rather than his relations to the Church. Religious truth was not something already possessed in complete and unchangeable form, it was something to be arrived at by free investigation of Scripture and open-minded discussion. In the presentation of Christian doctrine his tendency was to simplify and rationalize it. Since he found God in the natural rather than in the supernatural, miracles whether biblical or ecclesiastical form an almost negligible factor in his thinking. The miraculous disappears wholly in his theory of the sacraments. He had little sympathy with ascetic and other-worldly types of piety, and placed

emphasis primarily on faith and love toward God and secondarily on the active Christian virtues. The ideals of the Apostolic Church constituted for him the permanent norm of Church life. His last words: "I know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified," indicate how completely he had emancipated himself from all non-essentials in religion and placed his reliance on the free grace of God revealed in His Son.

CHAPTER IX

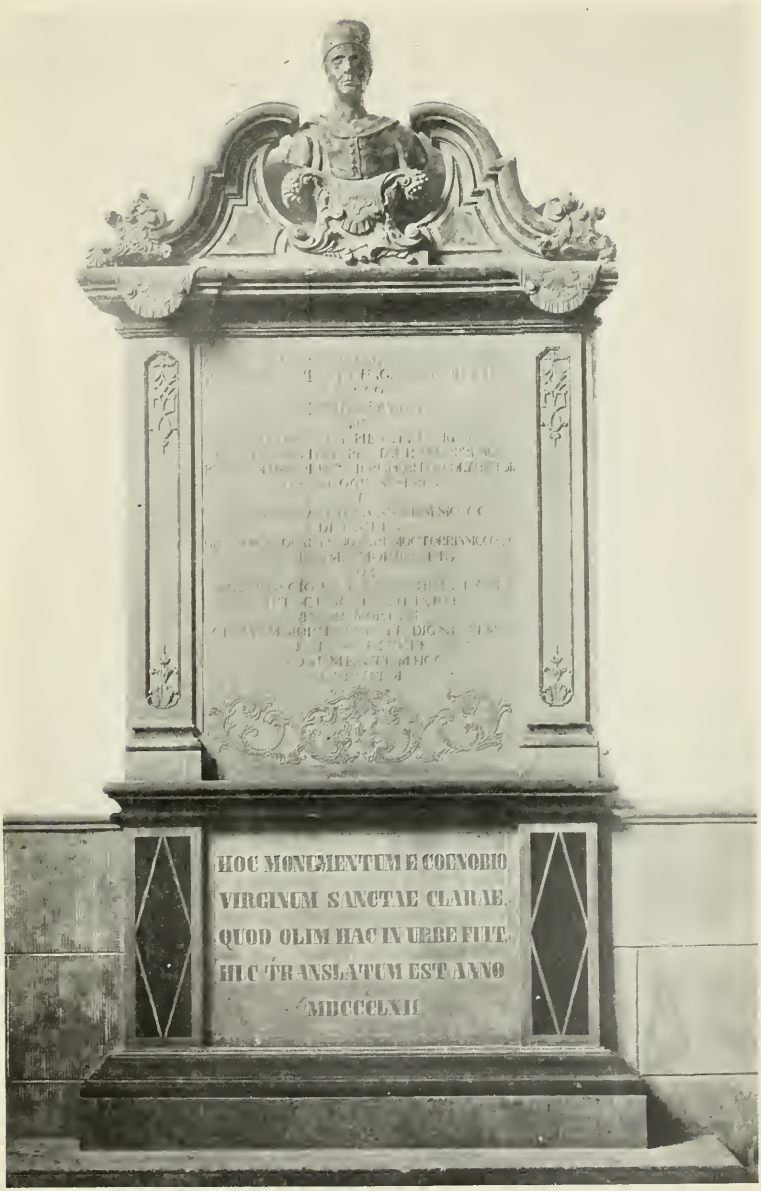
WESSEL'S RELATION TO THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT

While Wessel may well claim our attention as a great fifteenth-century scholar of evangelical spirit, yet our interest in him centers naturally in his contribution toward a movement that culminated long after his death. The Reformation is a fact of such supreme importance that men living in the period preceding it are largely estimated with reference to it. Erasmus, Wessel's most celebrated compatriot, in spite of his great services to classical and biblical learning, has suffered in popular esteem because of his failure to ally himself with the evangelical movement to whose beginning he gave such a strong impulse. On the other hand, the memory of a group of otherwise relatively obscure men has been preserved chiefly because they have been regarded as precursors of the Reformation. Their work has been estimated, not so much by its importance to their own age, as by its influence upon a movement that was scarcely within the horizon of their thought. Wessel was conscious that a change was soon to come over the Church. In his later years he was accustomed to predict this with great positiveness. It was to come within the lifetime of his students. But the change that he anticipated was not to overthrow the constitution of the Church nor recast its dogmatic system nor transform its worship. What he consciously worked for and looked for was a change in theological method, the recognition of the Scriptures as the supreme religious

authority, an amendment in the administration of the Church, a curtailment of the power of the pope and the prelates. It is probable that he would have been quite appalled by such a revolutionary program as that of Luther or Zwingli.

Yet after this has been said it still remains true that the influence of such a life as that of Wessel tended strongly to prepare the way for Protestantism. This becomes the more apparent when we recall the age in which he lived, the second century of the Renaissance, the pivotal period in the transition from medieval to modern times. When we contrast the men who were shaping the thought and controlling the policy of the Church at the time of Wessel's birth with that remarkable group of men who were coming to positions of leadership at the time of his death we are impressed with the transitional character of his age. A few familiar examples will serve to illustrate this. Wessel's mature life spanned the distance between Laurentius Valla and Erasmus and between Gerson and Luther. Huss was burned five years before Wessel's birth and Zwingli was born five years before Wessel's death. Constantinople fell when he was thirty-three years of age, printing was invented when he was thirty-five. During his lifetime began those explorations which three years after his death culminated in the discovery of the western continent. His was an age full of important happenings and alert with eager expectation. In such an age, the influence of a life like that of Wessel, exerted at centers of learning, could not but contribute to the slowly gathering forces which were to combine in the Protestant movement.

It is obvious that Wessel assisted in carrying forward the movement toward the better administration of the Church and the curtailment of papal authority of which the Reforming Councils were the most prominent expres-



Tablet Marking the Tomb of Wessel Gansfort, Originally in the Convent of the Spiritual Virgins, now in the Church of St. Martin

sion. His conscious sympathy with the great French leaders of this movement, Peter d'Ailly and John Gerson, is evident from his approving citations from their works. In his frank criticism of abuses in the Church and his advocacy of radical amendment in its administration, Wessel stood in succession to these noble men and those whom they represented.

He also afforded in himself an illustration of the early blending of two distinct tendencies which were to unite so strikingly in Luther and many of his colleagues. From Thomas à Kempis and the Brethren of the Common Life, Wessel had early received influences which strongly tended toward a mystical type of piety; at Cologne and Paris he had been trained in the rigid discipline of the Schoolmen. The uniting of these two streams of influence in Wessel made him appear as something of an anomaly to his contemporaries. He had the fervid simple piety of the Brethren and a fondness for exact definition and a passion for logical precision to which the typical mystic was a stranger. In this combination he presents a remote archetype of the modern Christian scholar in whom evangelical fervor and critical acumen combine.

As a Humanist and, in the northern lands at least, as a pioneer in the study and teaching of Greek and Hebrew, Wessel unquestionably rendered important service in the preparation for the Reformation. It is a significant fact that the interest of scholars in the study of the so-called sacred languages was a necessary preliminary to popular interest in the Scriptures when they should appear in the vernacular. The Reformation leaders came to their convictions largely because of their first-hand knowledge of the Scriptures and the Fathers. They were able to convey their convictions to others, because they could assure them that they were based upon an accurate knowledge of the Word of God. They could

also offer their vernacular translations with the assurance that they rendered faithfully the meaning of the original. To all this a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew was an absolute essential. Consequently men like Wessel and his pupils, if we may so call them, Agricola and Reuchlin, who popularized the study of these languages in the universities, were not only creating a demand among scholars for the critical editions of the Scriptures which Erasmus was soon to bring out, but were also making possible a widespread popular reading of the Bible in the following generation. The synchronism of this new interest in the sacred languages and the invention of printing is a fact of unique importance. The first printed copy of the Latin Bible appeared in 1455, when Wessel was thirty-five years of age; the first Hebrew Bible was issued from the press the year following his death. Erasmus' critical edition of the Greek New Testament appeared a quarter of a century later, in 1516. In the next decade Bibles were printed in German and English and French.

Wessel's contribution to what might be called the biblical preparation for the Reformation may be illustrated by his relation to a group of representative humanistic leaders. Notable among these was a fellow-countryman who is best known by his Latinized name, Rudolph Agricola. He was a native of the village of Laflo in the neighborhood of Groningen and was Wessel's junior by twenty-three years. There is reason to believe that he made Wessel's acquaintance before he left the Netherlands; in any case, he was much in his company at Paris and later at Groningen. He regarded himself as a disciple of Wessel and was deeply influenced by his teacher and friend not only in the pursuit of his studies in the biblical languages, but also in his character as is indicated by the more earnest and evangelical spirit which animated him during his later years. He was recognized as one of the

leading classical and Hebrew scholars of his day and did perhaps more than any other man to popularize humanistic studies in Germany. Another distinguished Humanist who fell under Wessel's influence while in Paris was John Reuchlin, a native of Pforzheim. When eighteen years of age he received from Wessel his first lessons in philosophy and Greek and very probably Hebrew also, and later after both had removed to the University of Basel, he continued to receive Wessel's direction in his studies. It cannot be doubted that the early intimacy of Reuchlin with this distinguished scholar thirty-five years his senior contributed much to the direction of his life interests. He began his career as a lawyer and was engaged in the service of the Count of Württemberg; later he accepted a professorship of Greek and Hebrew at Ingolstadt. Though he rendered important service to the cause of classical learning, his greatest contribution was to biblical scholarship in that he became a pioneer in the introduction of Hebrew into the curricula of the universities. His efforts on this behalf involved him and half the scholars of Germany, together with the monks and the papal court, in one of the most bitter controversies of the period. It ended in a formal victory for the obscurantists, who would have prohibited the study of Hebrew utterly, but in a practical triumph for Reuchlin, since over forty leading German scholars were led to commit themselves to the cause that he had advocated. This controversy had been precipitated by his publication of a Hebrew grammar and lexicon, sorely needed helps to the study of that hitherto neglected language. It is to be recalled that Reuchlin was the uncle and patron of Melanchthon and that he started him upon his academic career.

Prominent in the circle of young scholars that surrounded Wessel in his later days at Groningen was Alexander Hegius. As is clearly indicated in the letter,

published herewith, written after a visit to a library of rare books at Basel, he regarded himself as Wessel's disciple. He offers him any of the books that he has brought back with him, asks if he may borrow his Greek Testament, and concludes by saying that he has followed his advice as to the method of instruction in the school that he was conducting. This fact has much significance, as Hegius was for a quarter of a century at the head of the great school of the Brethren at Deventer which had at times an attendance of over two thousand, and counted Erasmus and many other men of note among its students.

Goswin of Halen was a youth in the monastery of Adwerd when Wessel made it one of his homes, and apparently served him as an attendant. It is he who writes of having heard Wessel and Agricola discuss the need of reform in the Church, till the small hours. He conceived a lifelong affection for Wessel, made a collection of as many of his writings as he could obtain, and is responsible through his letters for the preservation of many interesting incidents of Wessel's later life. He became a man of influence and was for many years head of the House of the Brethren at Groningen. He lived through the first stage of the Reformation and identified himself with it. Through correspondence with him Melanchthon came into possession of the facts regarding Wessel that were incorporated in the oration on Agricola.

One other example of Wessel's disciples in the Groningen circle will suffice to indicate the character of his influence over them. Willem Frederiks was among those who in early life came into friendly relations with Wessel and later carried his teachings to their logical consequences in the doctrines of the Reformation. He was a man of unusual learning and eloquence, a popular preacher in St. Martin's Church in Groningen. In a most cordial letter Erasmus writes to him: "You shine before all

by the purity of your life, by your indefatigable zeal in feeding the flock with gospel doctrine, and by gathering about you clergy, who by their pure morals and sacred learning are an ornament to the Church." It would be possible to trace the effect of Wessel's teachings and personal influence into a much wider circle if one were to follow them into what might be called the second generation of his pupils. Two of these may be mentioned in passing. They are Albert Hardenberg and Gerhard Geldenhauer, pupils of Goswin, who became able and fearless leaders in the Reformation in the Netherlands and in Germany. Each indicated his indebtedness to Wessel by writing a sketch of his life.

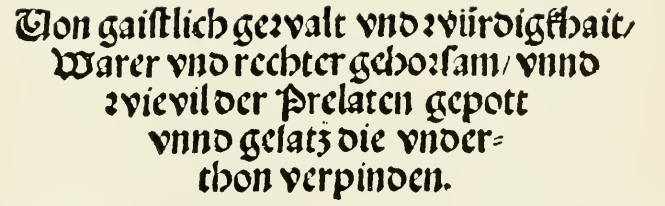
Thus far we have been concerned with the effect of Wessel's personal influence and teachings upon his friends and pupils. But he exerted a much wider, if less intense, influence through his writings, of which there were originally about twenty. With the exception of the *Mare Magnum*, composed mainly of excerpts from the writings of others, and two pamphlets on medical practice, they were treatises on a wide range of religious and theological subjects. In bulk they would have made a volume perhaps twice the size of the Bible. Most, if not all, of them were written during the last ten years of his life. The printing-press was already coming into wide use, but there is no record of any of Wessel's works being printed until about thirty years after his death. That, however, would not necessarily prevent his writings from having a comparatively wide circulation. Before the press came to his assistance, there were at least three ways by which an author could publish his book. He could have professional copyists manifold it for the market; he could deposit it in some public place where it could be read or copied by anyone who pleased; or he might read it or have it read aloud in places where it would easily attract an

audience. It was possible by one or all of these methods to give extensive publicity to the contents of a new book. Luther in his letter to Rhodius of Utrecht expresses surprise that the works of Wessel were not more widely read. He writes: "I wonder what ill luck prevented this most Christian author from being more extensively known," and then proceeds to offer two possible explanations: perhaps it was because Wessel's life was so uneventful and free from the conflicts which had called the world's attention to his own writings, or Wessel may have been reluctant to give publicity to his views lest he fall under the condemnation of the inquisitor. The former of these explanations doubtless has some weight. Wessel's life had in it none of the elements of dramatic interest and conflict with established authority which called the attention of Europe to the teachings of a hitherto obscure Saxon monk. But the other explanation, "fear of the Jews," as Luther expresses it, certainly did not deter Wessel from a free expression of his opinion either with his pen or his voice. In view of all the circumstances it seems probable that Luther was mistaken as to the extent to which Wessel's writings were known. They had not come to his own notice till he was well launched on his career as a Reformer, and he not unnaturally inferred that they had had but few readers. But the number of men in different regions who were influenced by Wessel's writings as well as the textual variations which arose from repeated transcription indicate that they were widely read, at least in the Netherlands and neighboring German states. Dr. Ludwig Schulze of Rostock speaks of Wessel's writings as "widely diffused, much read and esteemed, and influential." Nevertheless, there were forces at work that limited their diffusion. Hardenberg, upon the authority of those who had witnessed it, states that soon after his death "all the manuscripts found among Wessel's

effects were by the zeal of the Mendicant Monks and the fury of some others committed to the flames." The older nuns in the convent at Groningen informed Hardenberg that they had seen writings belonging to Wessel burned on the suspicion that they were heretical. Copies must have existed of the writings thus destroyed, and several of his writings must have entirely escaped these vandals, for the *Mare Magnum* and the copy of the Greek New Testament presented to him by Pope Sixtus IV were still in existence in the following century. And it is beyond question that several of Wessel's writings, now classified as lost, were in circulation during the sixteenth century. Hence it would seem that the fury of the inquisitor which could not reach the author because of the protection of his friends, failed to a large degree in its effort to destroy his writings. His enemies apparently succeeded better in a policy of obstruction, by which they prevented the free multiplication and distribution of his works, using their influence to discredit them with students and others who might be disposed to read them. Some such process of suppression is alluded to by John Arnold Bargellan in a letter prefixed to the edition of the Farrago published in Wittenberg in 1522 in which he says that Wessel's writings "have been hindered even unto this day." And Adam Petri in the introduction to his early edition of the Farrago implies the same in his exclamation, "Behold what an author has been removed out of the way, and by what sort of men and for what cause! But God will not permit these writings wholly to perish."

As we are here concerned with the influence of Wessel's writings only as they contributed to the Reformation cause, we may disregard the printed editions of his works that appeared after 1550 when the Reformation may be said to have been an accomplished fact. His first

writings to receive currency by the aid of the printing-press were those issued with the title Farrago about 1520. Under the impulse of Luther's encouragement it soon passed through several editions. There is reason to believe that presses in Heidelberg, Basel, and Leipzig, besides those in Wittenberg, were engaged in issuing it. The book was evidently in great demand, not only in the Netherlands, but also in Germany and Switzerland. But although the Farrago presents Wessel's characteristic doctrines, it contains but a small fraction of his writings. Its popularity naturally led to the publication of some of his other writings. A small collection of his Letters and a treatise on the Eucharist were issued very early, evidently by the same press, but without any indication of date or place. Soon after there appeared a volume, apparently in Brussels, containing his discussions on the Incarnation, the Passion, and the Lord's Prayer. It is now demonstrated that at least one of Wessel's works, *De Potestate Ecclesiastica*, was early translated into German. Two copies of this rare pamphlet were brought to light by Professor J. J. Doedes, one of Wessel's biographers. A photographic copy of the title-page of one of these copies, now in the University Library at Groningen, was recently sent the writer and is reproduced in this volume. This translation which apparently appeared in the third decade of the sixteenth century indicates the popular interest in Wessel's conception of the authority of the Church. Although, as has just been noticed, selections from his writings began to be published as early as 1520, nearly a century elapsed before in 1614 the first complete edition of his extant works was issued in his native Groningen. The range of the circulation of his writings and the stir that their teachings had occasioned, even previous to the meeting of the Council of Trent, may be inferred from the fact that the Tridentine


Von gaiſtlich gewalt vnd wirdigkhait/
Warer vnd rechter gehorſam/ vnnd
wievil der Prelaten gepott
vnnd gelatz die vnder-
thon verpinden.

The Title-page of a German Translation of Wessel's Essay on Ecclesiastical Dignity and Power, Made during the Reformation

It is the only one of Wessel's writings hitherto translated. There are several copies in existence

Fathers honored them with a place in the first class of prohibited books.

It is evident that whatever may have been the circulation and influence of Wessel's writings during the thirty years between his death and the first printing of the Farrago, there can be no question of their wide circulation and large influence in the decisive years that followed 1520. They appeared just in time to win many to the Protestant cause and to assist in shaping the doctrinal standards of the Reformed branch of Protestantism. One evidence of this is to be found in the ready acceptance accorded the new movement in the three centers where the last years of Wessel's life were spent and where his writings were current, Basel, Heidelberg, and Frisia. Not only did these regions show their readiness to join the Reformation movement, but they also manifested a determined preference for that type of doctrine of which Wessel was the first and in some respects the ablest advocate.

Notice should be made of the tributes paid to Wessel by men of the Reformation period, who of course knew him only through his writings. Some of these are the more remarkable because of the singular veneration and affection that they display. The jurist, William Sagarus, Councillor in Brabant for Charles V, had so great an admiration for Wessel that he was accustomed to carry about with him in his bosom the treatise on the Causes of the Incarnation and to declare that to it he owed his knowledge of Christ. He came once to Groningen, as to a shrine, and at Adwerd and the Convent of the Spiritual Sisters requested that he might see any memorials of Wessel that they possessed. He was shown some of his books and writings and also his skull, which he reverently kissed and desired to purchase. Evidently some of the early Protestants retained their former fondness for relics,

for another ardent disciple of Wessel, Regner Prædinius, Rector of St. Martin's School at Groningen, a schoolmate of Hardenberg, was the happy possessor at this time of Wessel's lower jaw, which had become detached from the skull, and was accustomed to display it to his friends as one of his very special treasures! He also contributed much to the dissemination of Wessel's views, which he taught with great enthusiasm to the thousands of students that attended his school.

So deep an impression had the writings of Wessel made upon Adam Petri of Basel that he brought out two editions of the Farrago and wrote in a letter which serves as an introduction: "In what other book except the Bible have you ever seen the whole work of Christ and the contents of Scripture set forth with clearer arguments, or the impostors and enemies of God combated with stronger ones?" It was also a disciple of Wessel, Rhodius, who successfully combated Luther's conception of the Eucharist not in the Netherlands only but also in East Frisia and in several of the Swiss cities. It will be recalled that among the writings of Wessel that he brought to Luther's attention was a treatise on the Eucharist which Luther did not think best to publish, as he did the others, but sent to Œcolampadius, who after reading it with approval forwarded it to Zwingli. This treatise may be accounted one of the chief influences which determined these Swiss leaders to take the position they did regarding the sacraments. Martin Bucer also came under the spell of Rhodius' convincing arguments. In a letter he tells of a visit that he had from him in the autumn of 1524, saying among other things: "I know of no one, not even Luther, whom I would prefer to this man in insight and judgment. . . . Although recognizing Luther as his teacher he owes much more along certain lines to Wessel." He then proceeds to tell how Rhodius, Bible in hand, reasoned

with him so convincingly that he was forced to give up the idea of the corporeal presence of Christ in the bread of the sacrament. This is a typical case. Rhodius became recognized as a leader in the Eucharistic controversy, but the doctrine that he taught with such persuasiveness he had derived from Wessel.

The effect of the discovery of Wessel's writings upon Luther is given in his well-known letter to Rhodius, which came to be prefixed as an introduction to the Wittenberg edition of the Farrago. He writes: "But my joy and courage now increase, and I no longer have the slightest doubt that I have been teaching the truth since he, living in so different a time and under such diverse circumstances, is so consistently in accord with me in all things." To this statement he must have made one mental reservation: he did not agree with Wessel's conception of the Eucharist. Out of this disagreement arose largely the strife which divided and weakened the Protestant movement. John Faber, Bishop of Vienna, a strong opponent of the Reformation, in a cleverly conceived brochure undertook to make capital out of Luther's statement that Wessel had been divinely instructed, by showing in how many important particulars Wessel differed from him. The work, which appeared in Prague in 1528, is more ingenious than convincing and is of interest chiefly as showing that the Catholic party did not wish to have the prestige of Wessel's authority appropriated by their opponents.

It is improbable that Wessel exerted much influence over Erasmus. Though they had many points of intellectual sympathy, their natures were quite diverse, and the great Humanist would doubtless have gone his own way without the assistance of his fellow-countryman. Yet by popularizing biblical studies, Wessel must have contributed much in preparation for Erasmus' work. For a whole generation

in various educational centers he had been emphasizing the supreme worth of the Bible as a source of religious truth and the value of a knowledge of the biblical languages as a means to its sure interpretation. The young men who had derived these ideas from Wessel, and there must have been hundreds if not thousands of them, were ready to use Erasmus' critical text of the Bible and aids to its study when it appeared. In his pamphlet on False Evangelists, Erasmus indicates his familiarity with Wessel's writings and his approval of the irenic spirit in which he wrote. He says: "Doctor Wessel has much in common with Luther. But in how much more Christlike and modest a way does he set forth his doctrines than do most of the theologians!" It is interesting to notice that one of Erasmus' writings on practical religion, the *Enchiridion*, was bound together with Wessel's Farrago. Such a volume, a fine example of the early bookbinders' art, is in the possession of the library of Union Theological Seminary, New York City.

It was to be expected that Melanchthon would recognize a congenial spirit in Wessel, and we have evidence that such was the case. He was a student at Heidelberg where Wessel had taught a generation before and where his name was still associated with that of Agricola as an advocate of the New Learning. It may safely be assumed that during his student days Melanchthon gained some knowledge of Wessel and his characteristic teachings. Later he gave his writings careful and approving study. In an oration on Agricola, whose contents he must have sanctioned even if he did not compose it, he speaks of Wessel as the intimate friend of Agricola, and goes on to characterize him as having "the greatest ability, to which he added the widest learning in all kinds of knowledge, having also an acquaintance with the Greek and Hebrew tongues, besides being drilled in religious disputation." Elsewhere

Melanchthon describes him as a learned man whose excellent writings require judgment on the part of the reader. Although there were few at the time with whom he could sharpen his opinions by free discussion, yet "in most matters he held the same truths that we are now teaching after the purification of the Church has taken place." There was much in the mental attitude and temperament of Melanchthon to render the teaching and spirit of Wessel acceptable to him, and it is worthy of special notice that the points of his final divergence from the positions of his great colleague were mainly those on which Luther differed from Wessel. This is but another indication of Wessel's significance in relation to the origins of the Reformed as distinct from the Lutheran type of Protestantism.

From even such a cursory survey of Wessel's contribution to the Protestant movement two facts become evident. Not only did he render an important service of preparation in his criticism of abuses in the doctrines and usages of the Church and in the encouragement of the study of the Bible in its original languages, but through his disciples and his writings he was an influential factor in the Reformation itself. The former fact has long been recognized in various quarters. Bayle calls Wessel "the precursor of Luther," Doedes quotes with approval the statement of another authority that he was "beyond doubt the most prominent of all those of the Germanic race who prepared the way for the Reformation, and stood nearer mentally to the Reformers than any other man of his generation."

But Wessel's relations to the Reformation were not merely those of a precursor. Indirectly through the Reformers whom he influenced, and directly by means of his writings, he became an important factor in the establishment of Protestantism. After they began to be

printed in 1520, the Farrago and other selections from his works entered the stream of Protestant writings and had their part in creating and confirming sentiment favorable to the Reformation. The many editions of the Farrago which appeared during the third decade of the sixteenth century indicate the demand that there was for the book at the very time when Protestantism was making its most rapid progress. The further fact that one of his most Protestant treatises was translated and printed in the German language shows that his influence was not confined to clerical and academic circles.

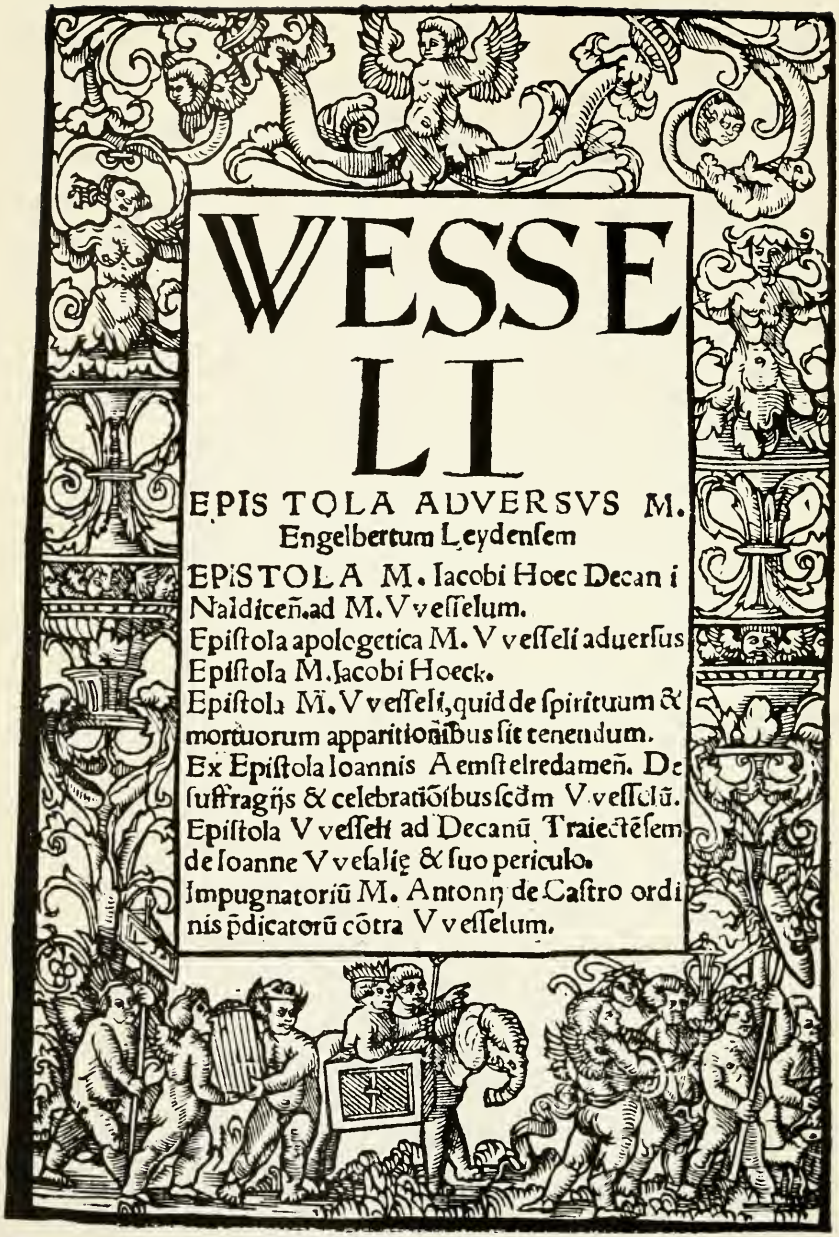
It is hardly exact to speak of Wessel as in any special sense the precursor of Luther. He was rather the precursor of all the Reformers except those that ran off into Anabaptist extremes. But as between Luther and Zwingli, for example, Wessel was unquestionably the spiritual father of the latter rather than the former. In other words, it is the Reformed type of Protestantism rather than the Lutheran to which the teachings and spirit of Wessel naturally lead. This is evident from many considerations but comes to impressive manifestation in the matter of the Eucharist, the pivotal point in the controversy between Luther and Zwingli and their followers. Wessel emphasized the memorial character of the Eucharist, and by implication at least denied the corporeal presence of Christ in the elements. It was his disciple, Honius, who first asserted that the word "is" in the significant statement, "This is my body," should be understood to mean "signifies." That was the point of fracture between the two sections of Protestantism, and to that point Wessel's teachings inevitably lead. Honius simply crystallized into one definite statement the truth held in suspension in all Wessel's teaching regarding the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

It was noticed above that the essay on the Eucharist was among the writings of Wessel that Rhodius brought to Luther, and that the Reformer approved of printing the others but demurred at the sentiments contained in this essay, sending it to Œcolampadius to get his opinion of it. A dramatic episode at Luther's dinner-table, reported by Hardenberg, in which Carlstadt in the presence of other guests challenged Luther to approve Wessel's treatise on the Eucharist and so come out in clear opposition to the doctrine of transubstantiation, may well be regarded as marking Luther's separation, not from Carlstadt alone, but from the other Protestant leaders in Germany and Switzerland in whom Wessel's teachings on the Eucharist were to find acceptance and advocacy.

Ten years later at the decisive Marburg Colloquy, Luther found himself confronted with a group of men who had been deeply influenced by Wessel's writings or disciples and who were confirmed in his view of the sacrament which was felt to be central to the faith and worship of the Church. When at the close of the somewhat heated discussion Luther exclaimed to the Swiss Reformers: "You have a different spirit from us," he expressed a fact which did not become fully apparent until the Lutheran and Reformed parties had matured their systems of doctrine and types of Church life.

It is also to be noted that in those centers where the influence of Wessel or his disciples was strong, the Netherlands, the Palatinate, and the northern Swiss cities, though the powerful leadership of Luther may have won acceptance for his doctrines at the beginning, yet when a permanent form of Church life and doctrine was to be established, they turned from Luther to the more congenial type of teaching and practice presented by Wessel and his disciples. It is facts like these that have led Ullmann and

others to regard Wessel as one of the principal founders of the Reformed Churches, which Calvin was later to provide with their complete organization in doctrine and polity.



The Title-page of the Completest Edition of Wessel's Letters

There is no indication of the time or place of its publication

CHAPTER X

THE LETTERS

THE few letters of Wessel that we possess may be said to have survived by accident. Their partly controversial character resulted in their being affixed to the Farrago and to at least one other theological treatise. But no two editions of the Farrago contain exactly the same letters, nor is there any explanation offered as to the basis of their selection. Four brief letters appear at the very end of the first edition of the Farrago. They occupy but twelve pages and constitute the final section in the chapter on Purgatory, being introduced by the simple statement, "Here follow certain letters by the same Doctor." The reason for their introduction is quite obvious; they have more or less bearing upon the future life.

In a later edition of the Farrago, published in Basel in 1522, the space occupied by the letters has expanded from twelve pages to seventy-two. To the four original letters seven others have been added, one of them thirty-seven pages in length. The letters are introduced by the same formula as before, and they still follow the chapter on Purgatory; but their increased importance is indicated by the larger print of the title and a conspicuous ornamental initial. Several of the letters have also separate page headings. In the Basel edition of the following year the table of contents gives the letters a place coordinate with the six essays that compose the volume,

introducing them as a seventh section. Thus the importance of the letters gradually won its way to recognition.

About the time of the appearance of the Basel editions of the Farrago there was issued a little pamphlet consisting of seven of Wessel's letters and the *Impugnatorium* of a certain Master Antonius de Castro, a long and rather violent reply to Wessel's second letter to Jacob Hoeck. The decorated title-page is shown herewith. The pamphlet gives no clue as to the time or place of its publication or the identity of its publisher. There were issued from the same press and presumably at the same time two other pamphlets containing Wessel's devotional writings, *De Sacramento Eucharistiae* and *De Oratione et Modo Orandi.* Copies of these extremely rare volumes are to be seen in the Public Library of the city of New York. They formerly belonged to the great English book collector, Richard Heber.

When in 1614, nearly a century after the appearance of the first edition of the Farrago with its four brief letters, Peter Pappus brought out at Groningen a complete edition of Wessel's surviving works, he added no new letters to those already published. He merely took the letter of Luther to Rhodius concerning Wessel, which had stood as an introduction to some early editions of the Farrago, and placed it with the other letters in a separate section at the end of the volume. He includes however one important letter that no edition of the Farrago contains. It had earlier appeared as a prefix to the treatise on the Eucharist. It is addressed to a nameless nun and contains advice regarding participation in the service of the mass. It is quite evident that these letters were preserved, not because of the light that they throw on the personality of Wessel, but on account of their incidental doctrinal elements.

The first thing to be noticed regarding the fifteen letters, whose translation appears elsewhere, is that they were not all written by Wessel. They may be described as letters by and to and about Wessel. Nine of them, however, are from his own pen. Three are addressed to him, one by David of Burgundy, another by Jacob Hoeck, and a third by Alexander Hegius. Of the three letters concerning Wessel the first was written by Luther to Rhodius, the second by John of Amsterdam to Bernard of Meppen, and the third by Wessel's earliest known publisher, Adam Petri of Basel, to Conrad Faber. Of these fifteen letters two do not appear in any of the early collections of Wessel's writings; one is, however, incorporated in Hardenberg's sketch of Wessel's life. They are here presented because of the sidelight that they cast upon the subject of our study. These are the letters written to Wessel by David of Burgundy and by Alexander Hegius.

As Luther's letter concerning Wessel stands first in the completest collection of letters that we possess we may well begin our analysis with it. The letter was originally addressed to Rhodius, who with a companion had brought from the Netherlands some of Wessel's writings to show them to Luther with a view to their publication. These writings consisted of the documents which were issued later with the title Farrago, a treatise on the Eucharist, and apparently a few letters. Luther read them with astonishment and delight, and with the exception of the essay on the Eucharist, advocated their immediate publication. In this letter Luther in characteristic fashion expresses his gratification and encouragement in discovering that this great scholar of the preceding century had held so many of the views which he was engaged in defending. He characterizes him as "a rare and great spirit"; and concerning the agreement in their

understanding of the gospel he makes this remarkable statement: "If I had read his works earlier, my enemies might think that Luther had absorbed everything from Wessel!"

Inasmuch as this letter, in the form in which we possess it, is directed not to Rhodius but to "The Christian Reader" and closes with a farewell to "The Christian Brother" and has other marks of impersonality in its address, it evidently has been altered somewhat, doubtless with Luther's consent, in order to serve as a foreword to the Wittenberg edition of the Farrago. There can be no doubt that this unqualified indorsement of Wessel by the leader of the Reformation did much to excite that popular demand for the Farrago which soon led to its repeated publication in different centers.

The letter of Adam Petri in which he dedicates his edition of the Farrago to Conrad Faber naturally challenges comparison with that of Luther to Rhodius. They were both written during 1522, and were both intended to commend the Farrago to the reader. Their lines of thought cross at several points, most notably in their regret that Wessel's writings have hitherto been so little known. Their explanations are the same, the scholastic theologians have found it to their advantage to neglect or ignore them. Luther's chief commendation of the teachings of Wessel is that they are so nearly identical with his own; Petri, however, likens them to the sacred Scriptures! Both claim for them a species of inspiration. Luther commends the Farrago to "the pious reader" with the caution that he must read with discernment, while Petri especially urges it upon the attention of two classes of readers: the theologians who have substituted philosophy for Christian truth, and neglectful pastors who need Wessel's teachings and his example of simple piety. In Luther's letter we have a hint of the impression that

Wessel's writings made upon a great creative mind, in that of Petri we see the enthusiasm that they excited in a simple scholar of strong evangelical sympathies.

Probably the earliest letter from Wessel that has been preserved is that addressed to Ludolph van Veen (*de Veno*), "most worthy Dean of the celebrated church at Utrecht and Doctor of both Laws." It is a human document of extraordinary interest, for it reflects the feelings of a man who faces the Inquisition. It was written from Zwolle on the 6th of April, 1479. Wessel apparently had not yet withdrawn from his professorship at Heidelberg. He was still exposed to the attack of the heresy-hunter. For the immediate occasion of the letter was the report brought to him by "most faithful friends" that when the inquisitors at Cologne had finally disposed of the case of his friend, John of Wesel, then being tried for heresy, they would turn their attention to him. The situation of peril and the urgent tone of the letter with its three references to death by fire indicate that the writer realized his danger, although he says: "I do not fear anything that I may have to undergo for the purity of the truth."

Ludolph was an intimate friend of Wessel; they had studied together in Paris. Apparently there was some friendly compact between them in the matter of correspondence. Wessel was accustomed, as we learn from a section in the Farrago, to submit his theological views to his friend's criticism. But besides being a theologian, Ludolph was an expert in Canon Law; and moreover he had himself, in his younger days, had experience with the Inquisition. So Wessel turns to him for counsel as to how he can best defend himself from the threatened attack. But though concerned for his own safety he does not forget the misfortunes of their friend, John of Wesel, already condemned to the flames for views much like those

that he himself held. He laments that their friend had been so rash in the statement of his opinions, that lacking the rigid logical discipline of the Realists he had often been unguarded in speech, and that he had made the grievous mistake of taking controversial matters into the pulpit to the confusion of his simple auditors. But he adds: "I cannot but love the man and sympathize with him in his misfortunes." The aged scholar, over eighty years of age and in broken health, escaped the flames by the recantation of his most offensive teachings and was sentenced to confinement in a monastery at Mainz, where he died soon after.

While Wessel makes most urgent appeal to his friend, the Dean of Utrecht, to give him the benefit of his knowledge and experience in defending himself in the court of the inquisitor, yet he makes no reference to the Bishop of Utrecht, whose personal protection would afford him much greater safety than the best legal advice. It is quite probable, however, that this letter to the Dean was partly intended for the Bishop, who long before, as his letter to be noticed later indicates, had offered him protection in case of danger from theological adversaries. In any case, his peril appears to have come to the Bishop's knowledge, for very soon afterwards Wessel gave up his position at Heidelberg where he was exposed to the wrath of the theologians at Cologne and established himself at Groningen in the diocese and thus under the immediate protection of the powerful Bishop of Utrecht, with whom until his death he was accustomed to spend a part of each year at his palace at Vollenhove, north of Zwolle.

Nothing could be sharper than the contrast between the acute anxiety manifest in Wessel's appeal to Ludolph and the atmosphere of cloistered serenity that pervades the two letters that follow. During the last ten years of his life Wessel spent a large part of his time in the Convent

of the Spiritual Virgins at Groningen, where he rendered service, not as a chaplain, since he was a layman, but as a revered and beloved spiritual adviser. It was apparently at the suggestion of the Bishop of Utrecht that the nuns offered an asylum to the aged scholar, who, whatever other compensation he may have made them, rewarded them for their hospitality and care by religious instruction and counsel and by composing prayers for their use, even as he wrote devotional books for the monks at Mount Saint Agnes.

The character of the counsel that he gave to his sisters of the convent may be inferred from the contents of his two surviving letters to nuns. He was apparently a familiar guest at other cloisters than that at Groningen and was in correspondence with some of their inmates. These two letters, so full of wise and tender counsel, disclose a most attractive side of Wessel's nature, and also afford an interesting glimpse into the Dutch cloister life at the end of the fifteenth century.

The charming letter to Gertrude Reyniers of the convent of Claræ Aquæ was written in reply to several practical questions that she had asked him. The first of these was in relation to certain ghost stories which were current in her region. How much credence should she give them, and how far should revelations by those who were reported to have returned from the dead affect our conceptions of the future life? There is no more reason to suppose that Wessel believed in ghosts than the theologians of to-day, but he tactfully avoids ridiculing the nun's anxiety over the stories that she had heard and turns her attention to what the Scriptures say about the future life and the small place they have for such phenomena as ghosts and visions and excursions into the underworld. All tales regarding these matters are to be taken with a large grain of salt! When one recalls how prominent a part

visions and other trance-phenomena had played in the cloister life of the Middle Ages he realizes how adroit yet firm was Wessel's handling of a very delicate matter. Many a convent had had its origin in an ecstatic vision vouchsafed to some pious maiden. Wessel, however, even ventures to imply that visions may be merely a wile of the devil!

In her second question the nun introduces a matter on which a man could speak with greater positiveness in the fifteenth century than would be advisable to-day. Should a woman study logic? The question means more than it seems to, inasmuch as logic was the preliminary discipline to philosophy and theology, and was the first step in university training. It amounted to this: Should a nun aspire to higher education? Wessel thought not. We need not assume that he would have discouraged the intellectual aspirations of all women, but recalling perhaps the futile hair-splitting of the university logicians and the wrangling of the theologians, he concludes that for a nun "the highest logic consists in love and prayer." That is her surest path to truth. On the other hand, he encourages her in the study of literature, believing that it will contribute not only to the broadening of her mind but also to the hastening of her union of love with her Divine Bridegroom. "No one," he adds, "really lives who does not love." The impatience of his messenger causes him to end the letter rather abruptly with a greeting to the Mother Superior of Claræ Aquæ.

It is impossible to ascertain the name or location of the nun to whom the second letter is written. If, as seems altogether probable, the preservation of the first letter was due to its teaching concerning the future life which in a remote way connected it with *De Purgatorio* to which it was appended, the preservation of this letter is clearly attributable to its teaching regarding the Eucharist since

it is found in none of the collections of Wessel's letters and appears only as a kind of epistolatory introduction to the treatise, *De Sacramento Eucharistiae.*

The nun to whom this letter was addressed had evidently written Wessel that she was willing to undergo any severity of bodily discipline in order to commend herself to Christ. He praises her devotion but warns her against the self-righteous complacency into which many fall. She must not deceive herself with the notion that she can commend herself to God by suffering or sacrifice, or by daily confession or communion. She must humbly accept the righteousness of Christ. Like Mary who sat at her Master's feet and listened to his words in intent devotion, she too will attain purity of heart not by severe fasts nor the wearing of a rough garment nor by any other austerity, but rather by "quiet longing, sweet tears, and kisses on the feet of Jesus." It will be sufficient bodily discipline for her if she simply discharges the tasks appointed her in the cloister.

As for participation in the Eucharist, Wessel does not disparage its value to her, but implies that it is more important that she feed on Christ by earnest loving meditation upon him. This he had written her in an earlier letter, and now he adds: "I assure you that if only with pious intention you muse upon your lover and betrothed who was given for your salvation, you not only embrace him, but since he dwells in the banquet-room of your heart, you eat his flesh and drink his blood." This statement is characteristic of Wessel's conception of the sacraments; he penetrates to the spiritual reality which the form embodies. Elsewhere he intimates that the Eucharist can be celebrated without any material elements whatever, through a purely spiritual participation, like that of the Quakers.

The four letters that follow constitute a distinct group.

They deal with a single subject, the state of the dead and the proper character of our prayers for them. Three of the letters are addressed by Wessel to monastic friends of his who were also friends of one another. The last letter of the group, written, after Wessel's death, by one of these correspondents to another, relates to their departed master's teachings concerning the future life. These friendly letters passing by messenger from one monastery to another give us a glimpse of the serious and noble character of the cloister life that existed in the northern Netherlands at the time. They also indicate the eagerness of the monks, even those of high rank, to receive instruction from Wessel.

It is indicative of the careless editing of Wessel's writings that in none of the editions of his works do the members of this group stand in their proper order, an order not difficult to determine from internal evidence. Nor has any editor identified the anonymous recipient of the third letter, "a certain man," with the chaplain at Adwerd, though there can be no doubt that the letter was addressed to him in acceptance of his good-natured challenge. Bernard of Meppen to whom the first letter of the group is addressed was a canon regular and later procurator of the monastery at Zila. He was evidently an intimate friend of Wessel and counted himself one of his disciples. This letter, which has lost both beginning and conclusion, was apparently a reply to one in which he had asked a number of questions regarding the state of the dead and our duty of prayer on their behalf. These questions Wessel proceeds to answer in a very characteristic fashion. The argument advances in a series of pictures that blend each into the next in a way that makes the progress of his thought rather difficult to follow even for one who is familiar with the biblical imagery in which his ideas are clothed. His line of thought may be summarized

thus: The religious life begins when the impulse of love to Christ moves our hearts. That love as it increases in this life purifies our natures; in the future life, in the very presence of Christ, that purification is completed and the soul is brought into perfect conformity with the will of God. But even the day of heaven dawns gradually and heavenly perfection is not achieved at once. Though we have no sin in that blissful life, our love for Christ being imperfect is subject to growth. We are accepted as spotless and perfect, but we are still wayfarers journeying toward more perfect love and obedience.

Hence, we may well desire and pray that our departed friends should make progress in the heavenly life. The dead desire that for themselves, the angels desire it for them. But it is quite another thing to pray that they be delivered from their sins. That involves a wrong conception of the state in which the blessed dead exist. They are already freed from their sins and accepted by Christ as spotless, though they are still wayfarers on the road to perfect love. This was, of course, a tacit rejection of the whole theory of purgatory, as a place of cleansing suffering for sin. So much superstition had become connected with the custom of prayers for the dead that Wessel declared that he did not desire that anyone should pray for him after his death!

His brief letter to John of Amsterdam, abbot of Adwerd, is unfortunately the only one that we possess of the many that passed between these intimate friends. Their correspondence continued till Wessel's death and thereafter his letters were treasured and consulted by the brothers at Adwerd. The greeting in this letter is most affectionate and its whole tone that of intimate friendship. It was written from Mount Saint Agnes near Zwolle, and contains a reference to other letters that had passed between them and an invitation to come to him and

continue their discussions. The immediate occasion of the letter was to call the attention of its recipient to a much longer letter being sent by the same messenger, Henry, to the chaplain at Adwerd. By way of friendly challenge the chaplain had sent word to Wessel that if he but had a chance to discuss matters with him he could cure him of his peculiar notions concerning the future life.

The long letter that follows is Wessel's reply to the challenge of the chaplain, who it intimates is already well acquainted with his views, as is also the lord abbot, who will sit as umpire in the discussion. The argument of the letter is a rather simple one: According to their own testimony the apostles were conscious of imperfection. Neither they nor anyone else can in this life be addressed in the terms in which in Canticles the Bridegroom addresses the Bride. It is only in the future life that such words are applicable to the Church, and even there, not at first, for the blessed do not at once attain to perfection. It is only by the gradual purification of love in purgatory—that is to say in paradise—that the redeemed soul progresses to the perfection of heaven. In this state of progress the cultivation of love for the brethren and for the Elder Brother prepares the blessed for the perfect love of God.

That this letter, as well as the one before it, should have been attached to the treatise on purgatory in the early editions of the Farrago is not surprising. They both assail the current notion of purgatory as a place of suffering for sin. Moreover, by affirming that even the apostles and saints went into the other life imperfect, they deny the possibility of their merits becoming a treasury of good works on the basis of which indulgences could be granted to the morally delinquent.

The last letter in this group has a pathetic interest in

that it is a witness to the reverent esteem in which even after his death the teachings of Wessel were held by his friends. It was written by John of Amsterdam, abbot of Adwerd, to Bernard of Meppen, procurator of Zila, and relates to the matter of prayers and masses for the dead—a subject on which, as we have seen, Wessel, who is referred to as "Our Master," had written to each of them. They do not venture to advance views of their own; they are concerned only to ascertain what Wessel had taught concerning it. And for that purpose John sends his friend a list of propositions by Wessel, recommending him to read them again and again since they do not yield their full meaning at a single reading. From these propositions the writer ventures to make two cautious deductions. The letter, as its title indicates, is incomplete.

The following group of four letters, though involving three different persons, is in a certain sense a literary unit, since they revolve about the one subject of indulgences. The first brief one was written by Wessel to Jacob Hoeck, dean of Naeldwick, a scholarly man of some prominence as a theologian. He and Wessel had apparently been students together at Paris years before and had corresponded somewhat in the years that had followed. Wessel states that he has written his friend once each year for the last four years and has also sent him for criticism a series of propositions concerning indulgences. Hoeck had promised to reply but had failed to do so. He was a busy man and very probably regarded Wessel's controversial epistles as something of an annoyance. The immediate occasion of this letter was to offer a gentle rebuke to Hoeck for having written to Cologne, presumably to the officers of the Inquisition there, calling attention to some of Wessel's teachings. For this he does not censure him but merely intimates that he should have first privately shown him his fault, reminding him of

the course that our Lord had recommended in dealing with an erring brother. He admits that some of his views are unusual, but he cannot refrain from holding them since "they have their origin in faith and in the Sacred Page." The truth will be brought to light through earnest discussion, and such discussion need not alienate friends, since his own many university disputations had not cost him the good will of his opponents.

The next letter of the group, written by Wessel from Pancratium in reply to one from Master Engelbert of Leyden, was apparently one of many that passed between these eager controversialists. Wessel and Engelbert were both friends of Jacob Hoeck, the latter having been his preceptor. Engelbert had recently written Wessel taking him sharply to task for his conceit and his presumptuous attempts to solve problems beyond his understanding. To his rather severe strictures Wessel makes the reply courteous, though there is a certain sting of sarcasm even in his formal courtesy. He meets Engelbert's arguments in support of indulgences with the line of reasoning that is elaborated more fully in the Farrago. In fact, an excerpt from this letter forms the first section in the essay on Penance and the Keys of the Church. His argument may be thus summarized: The power of binding and loosing possessed by the apostles was used "in the exercise of their ministry, not of their authority." Neither they nor their successors had any right to impose penalties on account of sins which God had freely forgiven. That the Church has done this is no proof that it is right, for grave errors have crept into her usages and wolves have usurped the place of her shepherds. Some of her popes even have been perjurers. God is the only one who knows the heart, and He alone can bestow forgiveness and grant indulgence. But plenary indulgence God grants to no one in this life, since no one is absolutely

sinless. But if God does not grant such indulgence how can the pope? Wessel concludes the letter with the suggestion that Engelbert discuss its contents with Hoeck and reply upon his advice. He also expresses the hope that the dean himself will sometime deign to answer his many letters—a hope which was soon to be fulfilled.

For the following letter is the long-expected one from Jacob Hoeck. In the greeting the writer uses the Latinized form of his Dutch name and signs himself Jacobus Angularis. He gives as his reason for not having written sooner the pressure of business and the lack of a messenger. The real reason comes out later: he was "horrified" at the boldness of some of Wessel's ideas. It was in such a mood, doubtless, that he had called the attention of the champions of orthodoxy at Cologne to Wessel's teachings. The tone of his letter is, on the whole, friendly. He refers good naturedly to Wessel's deserved title, "Master of Contradictions," and modestly disclaims any expectation of making an impression with arguments "upon that hard, impenetrable, undaunted head of yours, which will yield neither to the hammer of common belief nor to the sword of ancient patristic authority."

Nevertheless, Hoeck proceeds to present the accepted teaching of the Church concerning tradition and indulgences, summoning such authority as he deems best and making some personal interpretations and qualifications. He admits that he is a conservative, distrustful of new views and content with the authority of the Church, and adds: "You know that there are many doctrines which one must believe under penalty of fire no less than those which are contained in the rule of faith." He squarely opposes Wessel's views on indulgences, already set forth in his letters and propositions, saying that he firmly believes that "the pope can decree, not only an hour, but many years of indulgences, indeed even plenary indul-

gence." His own view of indulgences, which he proceeds to give at some length, is of great interest as the statement of a cultivated practical churchman of the fifteenth century, concerned to keep within the bounds of orthodoxy and yet disclaiming the irrational and immoral excesses to which the doctrine and practice of indulgences were subject. Especially adroit is his quotation of Scripture, to whose authority he knew that Wessel would unhesitatingly yield, and his citations from Augustine and Gerson, whom Wessel accounted the soundest of theologians. It is, however, the abjectly obedient subject of the Church that speaks in statements like these: "You ought to regard as a strong reason—nay, as stronger than reason—the authority of the pope supported by that of the prelates and the doctors," and "If you thus exalt the Church of our pilgrimage you need not fear that you will blaspheme the King or give offense to the Kingdom of Heaven." The Dean closes his letter with an apology for its inadequacy, due, he intimates, to his lack of leisure and many interruptions. He requests a prompt reply and promises a continuation of the discussion which he hopes may result in a better mutual understanding and a clearer definition of the truth.

In less than two months Wessel had written and forwarded his reply. It is a very long letter, longer by half than Paul's Epistle to the Romans. In the Groningen edition, the compact Latin original occupies thirty pages. Yet it is a letter, not a mere treatise, though for convenience of reference the editor has seen fit to divide it into chapters. It is intensely personal and consists largely of replies to the arguments that Hoeck had advanced in his letter. As it deals chiefly with the vexed question of indulgences, it must be accounted one of the most important of Wessel's controversial writings. Extended excerpts from it appear in two of the main divisions of the Farrago,

and inasmuch as it is a continuous treatment it affords us our best example of Wessel's method in controversy.

While the letter begins and ends with emphatic protestations of respect and affection and contains many gracious compliments, yet its tone is at times rather sarcastic, and the remorselessness with which it follows up an advantage in the argument hints the reason for Wessel's having been so dreaded an antagonist in debate. It must be admitted that the letter could not have been very agreeable reading for the Dean, and he can be excused for not having answered it. It was in a sense unanswerable.

There are some very interesting autobiographical allusions in the letter, and references to theological writers evidently highly regarded at the time but now wholly forgotten. Its argument is too long and too complicated to be reproduced even in outline. It is substantially that which appears in the sections of the Farrago which relate to indulgences, but it is here presented with much greater consecutiveness and cogency. Especially skillful is the selection of passages from Gerson, whom Hoeck had quoted, which show that indulgences had been assailed by that much venerated author; and equally adroit is the retort to Hoeck's statement that the "common belief" is opposed to his views, in which he shows that there has been such a variety of teaching and practice in relation to indulgences that no common belief can be said to exist. No less ingenious is his declaration that the first and only plenary indulgence was granted by Saint Peter. That Wessel did not deny the value of tradition, though he insists most emphatically upon the Scriptures as the supreme authority in matters religious, is evident from this concession: "I know that certain things which were not written [in the New Testament] were handed down to us through the apostles, and that

these traditions are to be accepted like the canonical Scriptures in the rule of faith." The Scripture and apostolic tradition and what is necessarily deduced from them one must believe. And there are other things, which obviously foster piety, which one need not reject. But these concessions are followed by a rigid investigation of certain alleged apostolic traditions regarding indulgences, indicating that he was unwilling to accept the dicta of the popes as to what traditions were apostolic. And as regards usages, he is willing to admit only those which can be shown to have been "handed down by Christ's apostles and to have descended to us through continuous observance by the Fathers." To the statement of Augustine, quoted by Hoeck, that he would not believe the gospel if he had not believed the Church, he replies that this declaration had reference only to the beginnings of Augustine's belief. It was through the Church that he came to the knowledge and acceptance of the gospel. The explanation is not altogether convincing, but it reveals clearly Wessel's sharp limitation upon the authority of the Church. His belief that the blessings of the sacraments are obtainable by those who have only a minimum of faith is in full accord with what may be called his religious optimism. He says: "No one doubts that the effect of the sacrament follows if the recipient opposes no obstacle."

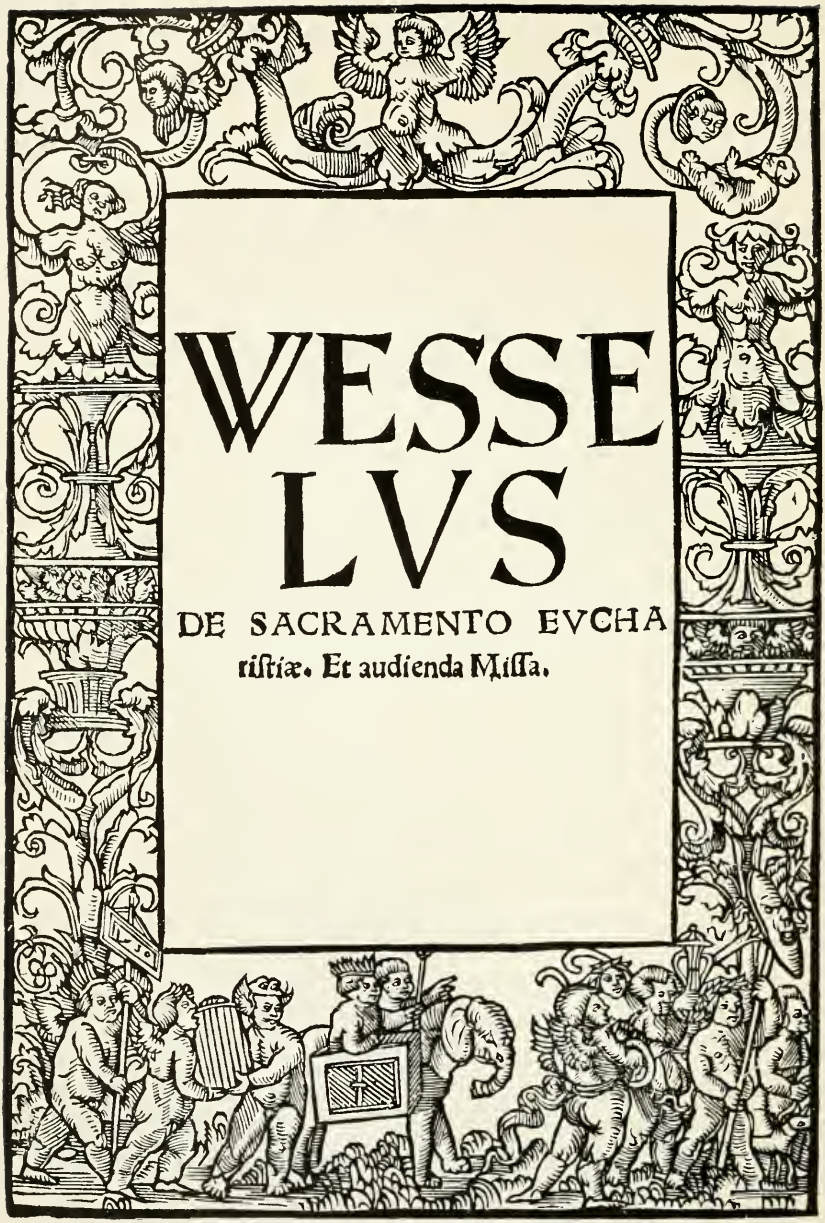
One of the many interesting digressions from the main line of the argument is that in which he defends the rigidly logical method and fine-spun distinctions of the scholastics, insisting that while in sermons to the people the truth should be presented in a less studied and formal fashion, yet "theologians must have recourse to logic." The inconsistencies of Gerson's teaching in reference to indulgences he attributes to his lack of logical precision. In the latter part of the letter he elaborates a favorite

idea, an interpretation, doubtless, of the statement in the Proverbs that "the path of the righteous is as the light of dawn, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." In this life we live in darkness illuminated only as by a lamp; at death "we exchange the light of the lamp for that of the day-star"; in paradise with the gradual perfection of love the day-star pales into the dawn and that brightens into the sunrise; then comes the perfect day of the blessedness of God. This gradual perfection of the soul in paradise is likened also to the preparation of a betrothed bride for the marriage chamber. But if the pope had the power to grant plenary indulgence, he might usher impure and unfit souls into the presence of the Heavenly Bridegroom! The letter leaves one with the feeling that so far as the conditions of the forgiveness of sin and the perfection of character are concerned Wessel had penetrated to the heart of the matter and stood firmly on the evangelical ground that faith and repentance secure the free remission of sin and that sanctification follows as grateful love burns out the impurities of the heart. Only those who love plenarily can receive plenary indulgence. "No confession removes sin unless it renders one dutiful through love."

Two letters to Wessel are appended, although they do not appear in any of the collections noticed above. The one from the Bishop of Utrecht was written in 1473, about the time that Wessel found it advisable to leave Paris for the freer atmosphere of Basel. It is a charming expression of friendship and generous appreciation and desire for the renewal of companionship. It contains also the offer of protection from those who were endeavoring to accomplish Wessel's ruin, an offer which he later accepted when the theologians at Cologne threatened him with the Inquisition. Hardenberg informs us that the sisters in the convent at Groningen possessed in his day a

collection of letters addressed by this Bishop of Utrecht to Wessel.

The letter from Alexander Hegius, distinguished Humanist and Master of the great school at Deventer, affords a glimpse of the relation that Wessel sustained to some of the leading educators of his day. Hegius writes as a reverent pupil to his honored master. He offers to share with him the use of some rare books by ancient authors which he has recently obtained on a visit to the famous library founded by Cardinal Nicolas of Cusa. He expresses a desire to borrow Wessel's copy of the gospels in Greek. Replying to an inquiry as to the method of instruction which he had introduced at Deventer, he assures Wessel that he had followed his advice in the matter, and would welcome further counsel from him.



The Title-page of the Essay on the Eucharist

There is no indication of the time or place of its publication

CHAPTER XI

THE TREATISE ON THE EUCHARIST

THE introduction of this work to the notice of the Reformers is graphically related by Hardenberg in his sketch of the life of Wessel. Admirers of his had found it with other writings of his among the papers left by his friend and correspondent, Jacob Hoeck, dean of Naeldwick. The document's appearance of age had raised doubts in some minds as to its authorship, though it was obvious that the views which it presented were similar to those that Wessel had held and taught. Hence Cornelius Honius and other Netherlanders interested in Wessel's teachings included it in the small group of his writings which they sent to Luther and the Swiss Reformers by Rhodius. It would seem that these Dutch scholars were more concerned to secure Luther's approval of the doctrine set forth in the essay on the Eucharist than his endorsement of the teachings contained in the other documents which were brought to Wittenberg. Hardenberg informs us that when Rhodius presented the essay to Luther he requested him, in his own name and that of others, to grant it his acceptance and public approval. This Luther declined to do, apparently from fear that the radical doctrines contained in the essay might impair the sanctity of the sacrament of the altar. Five years later, however, he is reported to have said that if he had earlier been convinced that there was nothing in the elements of the sacrament but bread and wine, he would

have been rendered a very great service, for he would thereby have been spared many labors and sorrows and enabled also to deal the severest possible blow at the papacy.

Hardenberg relates a dramatic episode that occurred at Luther's table, in which Dr. Carlstadt, one of several guests, after having failed in the effort to persuade Luther to adopt and defend the view of the Eucharist presented in Wessel's essay, was challenged by his host to undertake the defense of it himself. His acceptance of the challenge marked the beginning of his alienation from his great colleague, and marked the beginnings also of those controversies which ultimately divided the Protestant movement. Luther, however, wrote for Rhodius a letter to Œcolampadius requesting him to read and give his opinion of the treatise on the Eucharist, and urging him to have Wessel's writings published at Basel. Œcolampadius did not care to enter into controversy with Luther and so recommended that the document be shown to Zwingli, whose prompt approval of its positions he afterward followed.

It is perhaps impossible to determine when or where or by whose authority the treatise on the Eucharist was first published. There were many who were concerned to give publicity to its conception of the sacrament and it probably appeared soon after it fell into the hands of Zwingli. It has its place, of course, in the complete Groningen edition of Wessel's writings, but it is also still to be found as a separate booklet, issued evidently by the same press that brought out separately the treatise on Prayer and the Letters. The type decorations, paper, and general make-up of these three little pamphlets are identical and they were all issued without any indication as to publisher, date, or place.

Prefixed to the treatise on the Eucharist, as a kind of

epistolatory introduction, is a beautiful letter written by Wessel to a nameless nun, whom he addresses simply as "My sweetest sister in Christ." It appears in one of the collections of his letters, and was attached to this treatise, because the conception of the Eucharist presented in them is the same. Instead of encouraging the nun to go frequently to confession and communion, he recommends her "to reflection and meditation upon the Lord Jesus." That he did not hesitate to commend to individuals the highly spiritualized conception of the sacrament that he presents in his treatise on the subject is evident from the following: "I would assure you that if with pious intention you muse upon your Lover and Betrothed, you have eaten his flesh and drunk his blood."

It was noticed above that there was some doubt in Hardenberg's time as to the authorship of the treatise. He describes it as "an ancient document," and states that there was a story current to the effect that it passed through many hands and so could hardly have been written by Wessel. As to the credibility of this story he is non-committal, though he apparently does not accept it. The various editors of the Farrago had had no doubt as to the authorship of the treatise, for they had included its twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth chapters in the section on the Incarnation and Passion. But even if the external evidence of Wessel's authorship were not conclusive the internal evidence is abundantly so. Whoever wrote the Farrago and the Letters wrote also this essay. The style is the same, many of the ideas are the same, phrases and illustrations not a few are common to them both. In several cases ideas which are elaborated in the Farrago are introduced in brief form in the essay even when not exactly germane to the matter in hand. The author appears to have made digressions in order to present his views on such controverted subjects as the authority

of the pope in the matter of indulgences and the character of the fires of purgatory.

Though the modern student's chief interest in this treatise is naturally theological, it is in no sense a theological discussion. It is essentially a devotional work, one of several that Wessel wrote in the latter years of his life. Its evident design is to assist the communicant to such an attitude of mind and heart as shall enable him to receive the utmost benefit from participation in the sacrament. It is a manual for the mass or rather for preparation for the mass—since it discourages the reading of any devotional work and even prayer itself during the sacramental service. Its practical design is indicated by the fact that it contains specific directions to the communicant. Its devotional character appears in the ease with which the discussion turns into direct address to Christ. In this particular it resembles Augustine's Confessions.

As befits a devotional writing it has in it nothing polemical. It contains no formal argument presenting the author's conception of the sacrament. It does not attack the doctrine of the physical presence of Christ, nor even contain the word, transubstantiation. It adroitly ignores the whole scholastic theory of the sacrament and centers the attention, not on a miracle bewildering to the senses and oppressive to the imagination, but on the historic Christ, living and dying for our salvation. While the progress of the author's thought is obvious throughout, almost all the chapters are variations on this one theme, stated near the beginning of the essay, "It is remembrance of Him that constitutes the true Eucharist."

To appreciate the full significance of that it is necessary to recall the fact that the sacramental development of the Church for the preceding five hundred years had been away from this simple New Testament conception. Its

central and essential feature was no longer remembrance of Christ but the miracle of the corporeal presence of Christ in the consecrated elements. By gradual approach the Medieval Church had come to identify the elements in the Lord's Supper with the historic body of Christ. Paschasius Radbertus in 844 published a treatise in which he taught that the substance of the bread and wine was at the time of consecration changed by a miracle into the very body and blood of Christ. He apparently believed that he was stating the generally accepted doctrine of the Church. But Ratramnus and others were prompt to deny this and to affirm the earlier view—sanctioned by the authority of Augustine—of the spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament. A bitter controversy ensued in which the general opinion of the leaders of the Church slowly swung toward the position taken by Radbertus. Finally, by a decree of the Lateran Council in 1215 this view of the Eucharist was given the authority of dogma. In the meantime the term, transubstantiation, had been adopted as expressing the mode of the change by which the elements became the body of Christ, and the scholastics had developed many refinements of speculation regarding it.

It can hardly be supposed that Wessel, who was familiar with the teachings of many of the Early Fathers, especially those of Augustine, and had acquaintance also with the writings of the scholastics, could have been wholly ignorant of the course of dogmatic development which had crystallized into the decree of the Lateran Council. But while he doubtless knew something of those differing opinions held by various fathers and scholastics it is improbable that he could see in them anything resembling a course of development. The evolutionary hypothesis has centered modern interest in the process by which one thing changes into another, by which, for example, a

doctrine in the course of centuries is slowly transformed into something quite different. But it may be questioned whether any medieval thinker could entertain such a conception. Wessel uses the historical argument in defense of many of his positions, yet it is doubtful if he could conceive of the service of the mass, as he witnessed it, as having slowly grown out of the simple feast of love and memory celebrated in the Early Church. If he entertained such a notion he gives no evidence of it. He was aware that his readers knew of the Lord's Supper only as then celebrated in the mass. That was the background against which he must present his conception of the sacrament. Yet he makes astonishingly few references to the mass, and never undertakes to trace the relationship between it and the New Testament ideal and usage. He simply cites the most pertinent biblical passages concerning it and allows the reader to draw his own inference. He leaves the chasm unbridged, and lets the primitive conception of the sacrament as set forth in the New Testament stand in unrelieved contrast with the current doctrine and mode of celebration.

That is the most striking feature of the treatise. It was written for readers whose only conception of the Eucharist was that derived from participation in the stately service of the mass, yet it presents a circle of ideas that revolve, not about the central feature of the mass, the miraculous presence of Christ in the consecrated elements, but about the historic Christ whose life and death were thereby held in loving and vivid remembrance. It is true that in the opening sentences of the treatise the reader is conceived of as attending the celebration of the mass in some church or perhaps monastery chapel, yet rarely thereafter does the thought return to that situation. The communicant is enjoined neither to read devotional books nor engage in prayer while the service of the mass is

in progress, but to give himself wholly to thoughts of our Lord, in obedience to his command: "This do in remembrance of me." That is the point of departure, for the reader is forthwith led away from all the external features of the sacrament, the familiar place and time and mode of its celebration, to fix his attention upon Christ's purpose in its institution and the most beneficial manner of its observance.

As has already been noticed, the one thought that dominates the entire discussion is that the Eucharist is essentially a memorial sacrament. Christ's words enjoining remembrance of himself might be written at the head of almost every chapter. But remembrance is not required for its own sake alone. It is the source of many other activities of the soul. "If out of remembrance there should spring any pious affection, we are bidden not to reject but to cherish and encourage it together with the root from which it sprang." "Do you wish to love? Recall what the Lord Jesus has done for you. For it is impossible to ponder frequently upon what your Lord God and Saviour has done and borne out of love for you without loving him in return." Through remembrance also is the presence of Christ achieved. "In proportion therefore as I remember thee, Lord Jesus, I have thee as my wealthy guest, the inmate of my peasant hut." It is probable that this consciousness of the spiritual presence of Christ is presented as a substitute for the corporeal presence of Christ in the consecrated elements, for it too effects a change in the recipient. "I know that out of my hut and humble cottage thou wilt erect a noble house." As a means of sanctification, the cultivation of the spiritual presence of Christ, through remembrance, is no less effective than the eating of his very body.

The steps by which the remembrance of Christ effects a change in us are outlined in a series of chapters, beginning

with the fourth. From remembrance we pass to reflection and the discernment of the body of Christ, a comprehension of the completeness of the sacrifice made and the salvation wrought for us. "The remembrance of such great works of God is indeed life-giving bread." "Have not all things developed out of this kernel of remembrance and meditation? The results of science and art, however brilliant or remarkable, have been secured by pondering, remembering, reflecting." Even a foretaste of the blessed life comes to him who remembers Christ. "Here on earth even we may live a great and vital life if only we do not forsake this fount of life vouchsafed to us in the remembrance of the life-giving body broken for us. For through this remembrance of thee we shall receive grace, true wisdom that we may reach proper decisions, and perfect righteousness." "Therefore, Lord Jesus, sweetest lover of mankind, thou art not merely with them that remember thee to aid them, but thou art in them to give them life. I pray thee that in view of my realization of thy presence now and at all times, to grant that I, thy son, may always and everywhere faithfully remember thee. Establish and strengthen me in the way of thy remembrance, by which through thee, the Way, I may proceed unto thee, the Truth, and that I may finally attain unto thee, the Life. Grant that I may always meditate on thee—thy sufferings, thy teachings, thy works, and thy commands. May this meditation and remembrance be for me the beginning of the holy life."

While to some remembrance of Christ is thus the beginning of a holy life, leading on to reflection and discernment, the consciousness of Christ's presence, and the foretaste of the blessed life, yet to others, "the little ones," those less capable of spiritual development, it is the sufficient means of salvation— "a plain and easy way that God hath made for the faithful." Remembrance is as

far as some can go. "I advise ordinary men, in accordance with their strength, to take merely this lower step of the ladder, and not to strive after higher, weightier, and more difficult things, for I fear their inconstancy, cowardice, and confusion, their fall and greater ruin." "Be not troubled with the lowliness of the act of remembrance." "In this wisdom of the little ones we may sit at the feet of Jesus with Mary and at the same time minister with Martha." This is in accord with the medieval idea, appearing elsewhere in Wessel's writings, that the ordinary layman in matters of religion is but a child, a "little one," from whom it is vain to expect much. The only adult Christians are the priests and monks and others that have specialized in religion. Wessel not unnaturally adopted this common view; but he is not wholly consistent in reference to it, since he elsewhere insists upon the priesthood of all believers and the parity of all Christians.

But though "the little ones" may well be content with a loving remembrance of Christ, those who are capable of making it the beginning of a holy life are encouraged to attain a deeper understanding of the sacrament. Christ is the bread of life, but he is not to be confused with the visible bread upon the altar. "The inner man is invisible, lives an invisible life, and is nourished and strengthened by an invisible bread." This inner life of man is created in the divine image and is sustained only as it possesses likeness to God. But the only point at which it may resemble God is in exercising love toward men. "Love is the breath and life of a godlike man." From it flow all the graces of the Christian life. To be the bread of this inner life of love Christ must arouse and sustain our love. This he does by his own love manifest in his life and death. We eat his body only as we love him and love our neighbors. Mere corporeal eating of Christ's body may

cause death; such spiritual eating of him in fidelity and love sustains the life of the soul. "However much one may eat and drink the visible Eucharist with the teeth and mouth, if the inner man does not live after God, he does not eat!" The believing, obedient lover of Christ is the only true communicant.

But if remembrance and the spiritual activities that follow it—faith and obedience and love and the rest—are the essential things in the sacrament, then the sacrament may be celebrated wholly apart from visible bread and wine and the service of a priest. He who exercises remembrance and love of Christ "has the benefit of outward and sacramental eating, just as did Paul, the first hermit." "To eat is to remember, to esteem, to love." This extreme ground Wessel does not hesitate to take and defend with a variety of arguments. Christ said that those who eat his body have eternal life; he also said that those who believe in him have eternal life. Therefore those who exercise faith eat his flesh. But before Christ's incarnation the angels and the faithful obtained eternal life, therefore they ate the flesh of the Son of Man. Many Christians like Paul the hermit have no opportunity to receive the sacrament at the hands of a priest, but they eat the body of Christ by remembrance and faith and love. The elements in the Eucharist are only symbols, their function is to excite remembrance. This the sight of them may effect just as well as the eating of them. "How greatly we would value bread which by the mere sight of it would feed those who look upon it. How greatly, then, must we value this bread of ours that quickens sacramentally, for this indeed quickens and refreshes solely by its symbolism and by our remembrance." This notion of the celebration of the sacrament apart from any visible elements indicates—as one may choose to regard it—either the highly spiritual view of the sacrament that

Wessel held, or the extremes to which he was willing to follow his logic. It is interesting to recall that he here takes substantially the same ground to be taken centuries later by the most extreme of the Puritans, the Quakers.

Having thus disassociated the idea of eating the body of Christ from any necessary connection with the merely symbolic bread of the altar, he proceeds to further elaborations of the conception of spiritual communion with Christ. To remember, to believe, to love—this is to eat the flesh of the Son of Man. And since eating Christ's flesh in this spiritual sense is the invariable condition of obtaining spiritual life, this was the means by which the angels and the saints of the ancient world attained salvation. "Before the incarnation, the angels did eat his flesh, even as did the Fathers in the wilderness, through the spirit of the Son."

From this bold spiritualization of the sacrament, Wessel proceeded a debatable step further. He affirmed that Christ is not only spiritually but also corporeally present, that is, present with all the saving potency that had been attached to his miraculous presence in the sacramental elements, wherever the faithful remember and believe and love. To those who thus feed upon him, "however solitary and secluded the place, he is truly there, not only by virtue of his divinity and because of his good will, but also corporeally present in all the beneficence of the power, skill, and fruitfulness that has been bestowed upon flesh and blood throughout the world." This idea is stated even more emphatically, and in sharp contrast with the popular notion that confined Christ's corporeal presence to the sacramental bread and wine, thus: "To the spiritually faithful he is given, even in bodily presence, outside the Eucharist and apart from the forms of bread and wine, since he is given to those who believe in him." Nor does Wessel hesitate to compare

the spiritual benefits of this non-sacramental communion with Christ with those that may follow the usual participation in the sacrament of the altar. "Indeed, in some respects spiritual communion is more fruitful than sacramental, at least in this respect, that in the former, so far as the laity are concerned, they both eat and drink, while in the latter they only eat." It is not to be wondered at that Luther, whom Von Ranke characterized as "one of the greatest conservatives that ever lived," should have hesitated to give his approval to a treatise which contained such apparent disparagement of the sacrament about which the worship of the Church had centered for more than a thousand years, and whose celebration was believed to involve the miraculous presence and saving power of Christ.

A still further elaboration of Wessel's thought regarding the consequences of spiritual communion with Christ appears in Chapter XIX, in which he declares that by such eating of Christ we are in turn eaten by him and so become a part of his body. By this he means that the sacrament has power to take possession of and transform those who participate in it. "It is just as when iron is made red hot, the iron absorbs the fire and yet is entirely possessed thereby. . . . But mental changes are even more to the point, for example, the pupil's faithful belief eats, so to speak, the teacher's wisdom; and the love of two lovers is fed by love." The transforming power of the sacrament is elsewhere affirmed to effect a species of deification, an idea that may have been derived from Irenæus. Concerning the worthy communicant Wessel asks: "Does it not seem to you that such a man is in some small measure a god and lives the blessed life even upon earth?"

The completeness of the sanctification which may be wrought by this spiritual communion with Christ is repeatedly explained by the statement that the sacrament,

though addressed to the memory prëeminently, nevertheless nourishes all the other faculties of the soul. The three faculties of the soul are: memory, intelligence (*intelligentia*), and will, and it is in this order that the sacrament makes its appeal and effects its transformation. That this is the psychological basis of Wessel's theory of sanctification is evident from his frequent reference to these "three faculties of the soul" and his minute analysis of their various functions. If the current popular conception of the operation of the sacrament was in a sense mechanical and automatic (*ex opere operato*), Wessel's was distinctly psychological. The benefits of the sacrament were received through the normal operations of the mind. Mere physical incorporation of the elements, he says, is inoperative. It is through mental processes that the body of Christ is appropriated and moral assimilation to him is wrought. It is the thought-life of the individual that determines his character, "for life and death depend upon our thoughts." "All arts, all works of knowledge, counsel, bravery, wisdom, fidelity, and benevolence have their beginning, seed, and root in meditation and remembrance. It is also by meditation that they have grown and advanced toward perfection, and when perfected shall be constantly fostered." That is to say, spiritual achievements are to be attained, not by sacramental magic, but by the same processes of the soul by which other great accomplishments are achieved. "Nothing is as effective in turning men's thoughts toward goodness as to have one's thoughts devoutly occupied with the life and passion of our Lord." The great importance which Wessel attached to the direction of one's thoughts as a means of sanctification is indicated by the fact that he composed a long treatise for the use of the Brothers of Mount Saint Agnes on the art of thought-control entitled "The Ladder of Meditation."

As was stated at the outset, there is in this essay an almost complete absence of the polemical note so conspicuous in parts of the Farrago and the longer Letters. Yet we find here a few allusions to the subjects on which Wessel had held lively debate with his theological opponents, and in these passages he states clearly his criticism of current usages and doctrines. Elsewhere he has elaborated his conception of purgatory, not as a place of suffering for sin, but as a vestibule of paradise where increasing love for Christ matures the redeemed soul and advances it toward the full bliss of heaven. A criticism of the current conception and a statement of his own view are thus adroitly made in the latter part of Chapter X. In speaking of the steps by which the redeemed come to perfect acceptance by God, he says: "They alone will be able to live in the eternal glow of divine love, because they alone will be made perfect by that true, pure, and real purgatory, and will indeed burn with love. Nor do those who burn with such ardent affection need any external purgatorial fire; they are purified as they ascend the steps by which they attain this height."

It is in this connection that one of the allusions to indulgences occurs. The worst abuses connected with this feature of the penitential system arose because of the popular belief that the souls of departed friends might be relieved from purgatorial suffering and admitted into heaven through indulgences, which could be secured by the payment of money or other means. Wessel scornfully dismisses this method of obtaining access to the joys of heaven. It is not by the purchase of indulgences, but by ascending the steep path of increasing love and self-sacrifice that one attains fitness to appear in God's presence. "For him that runneth along this sublime way our indulgence-mongers will not be able to keep their indulgences intact, unless they affirm that the

pope has plenary authority to provide for it—especially in its later stages." At the end of the next chapter, speaking of the wrongfully assumed authority of the popes to determine when and how the soul may be released from purgatory and ushered into the joys of heaven, he concludes thus: "Therefore no mortal, however great his authority may be, has the power to fix or determine anything concerning the mode or postponement of one's purification or the manner of one's reaching the end of this way."

Besides these references to purgatory and indulgences, the treatise contains a few somewhat casual statements of Wessel's views on other subjects theological in character. In Chapter VII there is a paragraph in which he presents in a few sentences the leading ideas elaborated in his essay on Divine Providence. The following statement that the will of God is the basis of all existence reads like an utterance of Jonathan Edwards: "It is by God's will that all the forces of nature, all its changes, processes, and growth are fixed within their appointed limits; so that if he ceased to exert his will, even for one moment, everything would return forthwith to its original state, nothingness."

The doctrine of justification by faith is several times stated, and in terms unmistakably Pauline. In Chapter II the substitutionary theory of the atonement is presented at some length. There are implications of it elsewhere. Especially interesting in view of Wessel's insistence upon the supreme authority of the Scriptures is his statement of the principle of biblical interpretation. He assails the use of isolated proof-texts so convenient to the dogmatist, and insists upon an inductive study of the passages bearing upon the subject under discussion. For example, he says that before one should come to a conclusion as to the meaning of such a scriptural phrase as "the

bread that strengthens man's heart," he should study "all the words to the same purport that are scattered throughout Scripture, in order that from all these points" the complete truth may be seen. By such a statement Wessel dissents from the rigidly deductive method of the theologians of his day, and allies himself with the modern biblical scholar.

One of the casual elements in the internal evidence of Wessel's authorship of the treatise appears in the use of illustrations that would be likely to occur only to a physician. In the first part of Chapter VII, in an exposition of the statement of our Lord that a man does not live by bread only, "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," appears this passage which betrays the physician, if not the exact anatomist: "It is then by God's command that the visible bread, through the bodily organs, strengthens the eater's heart; since it is by his will that it is digested by the stomach, drawn into the liver, changed into blood, and through the veins distributed into the limbs!"

CHAPTER XII

FARRAGO RERUM THEOLOGICARUM

SUCH is the title that was given to the first collection of Wessel's writings to appear in print. Farrago means medley or miscellany, and its use here indicates that the editor realized the lack of unity and order in the collection of writings that he was issuing. Hardenberg, Wessel's earliest biographer, relates the circumstances under which these documents were collected and printed. Several Dutch scholars favorable to the Reformation, most prominent among whom was Cornelius Honius, an eminent advocate at The Hague, had become interested in certain writings of Wessel which had been found among the papers left by Jacob Hoeck, at one time dean at Naeldwick. Realizing that the views presented therein were in substantial agreement with the doctrines being taught by Luther, they decided to submit them, and such other writings of Wessel as they could find, to Luther's approval. Rhodius, one of the many Brethren of the Common Life who adopted Protestantism, was chosen to go to Wittenberg and bring these writings of the Dutch scholar to the attention of the Saxon Reformer. The impression which they made upon Luther is indicated by his commendatory letter to Rhodius concerning them, and by his advocacy of their immediate publication, as offering strong support to his cause.

The Farrago soon passed through many editions and underwent extensive expansion in the process as other

writings of Wessel bearing upon the subjects treated therein came to light. The earliest issue contains no sure indication as to its time or place, but its appearance could not well have been later than 1521. Very soon after appeared the Wittenberg edition, and in September, 1522, that of Adam Petri of Basel, who brought out still another edition in the following year. A fifth edition was issued in Marburg in 1617. The Farrago also had its place in the complete collection of Wessel's writings then extant which had been published in Groningen in 1614.

The structure of the Farrago is implied in its title. It is not a literary unit. It is a collection of essays and letters and series of propositions and fragments, roughly grouped under six heads. As a consequence, it is in places rather difficult and unsatisfactory reading. It possesses, however, this merit, that in a comparatively small compass it presents the author's views on a wide range of subjects, especially those in which he anticipated the teachings of the Reformers. It also illustrates the variety of literary forms in which he was accustomed to present his ideas.

As to the source of the materials that compose the Farrago, it has been already noticed that Cornelius Honius and his friends had found among the papers of Jacob Hoeck several of the documents that compose the first edition. Further search elsewhere brought other related writings of Wessel to light, and these were incorporated in the later editions. In his later years at least, Wessel was an industrious writer and an inveterate correspondent. Although the monks may have burned such literary remains of his as they could find in the cloister in which he died, yet most of his writings appear to have survived this characteristic attempt to answer arguments by fire. This may have been due to the fact that his writings had been copied by his admiring pupils or were being circulated

among his friends outside of Groningen. Apparently no attempt was made by the editors of the Farrago to secure anything more than representative statements of Wessel's views on the matters then under controversy. This gives a fragmentary character to certain sections of the book; one comes upon passages from letters, excerpts from other treatises, propositions designed for discussion with his students, comments on the writings of others, and extended expositions of Scripture.

The editor's division of the subject matter into six chapters aids the reader somewhat, but with two exceptions there is much matter in each chapter that does not relate itself readily to the chapter-heading. As for the subdivisions of each chapter, they are of two sorts. In the long and consecutive treatments, such as the essay on Divine Providence, the subheads are like insets in a modern text-book; they merely summarize the contents of the page or paragraph. In other cases, the captions of the subdivisions often introduce matter that has no structural relation to what has gone before, but is evidently introduced because it is believed to have some bearing upon the general subject under discussion in the chapter. Several of these headings indicate the source of the material that they introduce, e.g. "Extracts from a letter of Wessel," or "Propositions sent to Master Ludolph, Dean of St. Martin's Church." Such captions prepare the reader for the abrupt changes in style and matter which he frequently encounters, and remind him that he is reading a miscellany.

But in spite of the inorganic character of the Farrago and the lack of critical care on the part of its editors, it makes a deep impression upon the patient reader. He finds himself in the presence of a religious genius as unique as the author of *The Imitation of Christ* or of *Theologia Germanica*, with, however, none of the monastic narrow-

ness of the former or the nebulous thinking of the latter. He meets also one who is not only thoroughly orientated in the learning of his day, but one who is an original thinker upon the deepest problems of life, a mystical yet scientific interpreter of Scripture, a fearless critic of the Church of his day, a constructive teacher of evangelical truth, and hence a prophet of the coming Reformation.

The wide range of the author's thought in the Farrago is often indicated by the number and variety of writers cited. In the essay upon the Divine Providence, for example, he makes reference to the views held by such ancient philosophers as Proclus, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander, and Themistius, as well as to those of the well-known medieval theologians and such obscure authors as "Brother John of Aachen." Among the ancient Fathers Augustine is most often quoted and almost always with approval. Indeed, it may be said that Wessel was more indebted to him than to any other non-biblical writer. Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose, and Jerome are also frequently cited, and among medieval writers Averroes, Gerson, William of Paris, Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Assisi, and Bernard of Clairvaux. The parts of the Bible most often alluded to are the Psalms, the writings of St. Paul, and those parts of the Gospels which record our Lord's dealings with individuals.

There are in the Farrago certain frequently recurrent ideas. They may be regarded as the outstanding conceptions of Wessel's never fully formulated theological system. Many of them involve some suggestive biblical passage. Among those that meet the reader most often are the following:

There is a gradual revelation of God to the individual believer. We now see Him dimly, as in the light of a lamp; death will come as the day star ushering in the dawn of

larger knowledge; then will gradually come the sunrise; finally, the full daylight of the beatific vision.

All Christians, and indeed the angels also are "wayfarers"—a word derived, perhaps, from the New Testament description of the Christians as "those of the way." They are en route, in the process of being perfected, and all the experiences of their lives are to be viewed in their relation to this pilgrimage toward God.

The Catholic Church consists of the faithful followers of Christ in every land. The basis of their unity is spiritual, not political. It rests upon their common faith and hope and love and their common possession of the Spirit.

The communion of the saints is the spiritual fellowship that exists among the children of God in all lands and ages. This is affirmed by the Psalmist when he declares that he is "a companion of all those that fear God."

The Treasury of the Church consists of the spiritual benefits to be derived from this communion of the saints, and more especially of the grace of God mediated through Christ in his Church.

The relations of the Christian with Christ are immediate and personal, as were those of his first disciples and followers; they are not dependent upon the mediation of the Church.

Abraham, David, Peter, Paul, and Magdalene, and the repentant thief are typical examples of a valid, saving religious experience, and to this fact the Church's doctrine of salvation must conform.

Faith, which includes belief and self-commitment, is the means by which a man comes into saving relations to Christ.

Love to God and to our fellows is the only sure evidence of the possession of spiritual life. Loving contemplation of the life and passion of Christ is the most profitable occupation of the Christian, for by this means his life is infused

into us. "No one lives who does not love"—an oft-repeated sentiment, apparently adopted from Raymond Lull.

The death of the Christian is precious in the sight of the Lord, since it brings the exile home to the fatherland, and ushers the wayfarer out of the lamplight of this dim life into the fuller knowledge and love of paradise.

There is no other purgatory than this joyous paradise, whose fires are nothing else than the purifying love which the more clearly discerned presence of Christ kindles, till the soul wholly possessed of love attains to the complete vision of God.

The great mass of believers are Christ's "little ones," children in the religious life, for whom the tenderest consideration must be exercised, lest they be given occasion to stumble. According to this medieval conception priests and monks are the only adult Christians. Of laymen and women not much religious knowledge or moral achievement is to be expected.

The Scriptures are inspired by God, and are the final authority in faith and conduct. They require, however, great care in their interpretation.

The efficacy of the sacraments depends upon the spiritual attitude of the recipient, and this no one but God can determine.

The forgiveness of Christ is so perfect that the Church has no right to impose penance upon the repentant as the condition of absolution.

The pope, having no authority to impose penance, and no sure knowledge of the spiritual condition of the penitent, and no right to draw upon the Treasury of the Church, cannot grant an indulgence, plenary or other.

The proper function of a priest or prelate is that of a minister of the truth and the sacraments, a physician to the spiritually ill, not a prince or judge.

No prelate, not even the pope, is to be obeyed if his commands do not accord with the teachings of the Scriptures.

The Church is badly administered by corrupt and ignorant men, nevertheless the children of God are safe in her keeping.

It is sin, not excommunication, that separates a soul from God.

It is impossible to present a satisfactory summary of the contents of the Farrago, for with the exception of two of its main divisions it consists largely of excerpts from Wessel's various writings and of series of propositions in which the thought is set forth in the most compact form possible. Nevertheless, there are certain outstanding ideas in each section of the book which form the nucleus about which even the least closely articulated passages are grouped. A brief exposition of these leading ideas, either by quotation or summarization, will now be attempted. For the sake of convenience in reference, the order of the main divisions or chapters will be followed.

I

CONCERNING THE SURE AND BENIGN PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

This section presents a consecutive treatment of its theme in a somewhat formal essay, whose argument may be summarized as follows: God is the efficient cause of all things. His will gives energy to nature and to man. Every creature expresses the thought of the divine artist. Though not dependent upon them, God ordinarily works through secondary causes, which are little more than occasions for man to cooperate with Him. In this cooperation with God lies the opportunity for godliness or sin.

Because of this conscious cooperation or its failure, we shall at the last judgment approve God's verdict upon our lives.

The reverent soul sees in the forces of nature an expression of the goodness of God. Nature is not automatic. It is nothing less than "the will of God regulated by the law of uniformity; while a miracle is the will of the same God exerted in some unusual manner." "Strange to say, although a man's destruction is the result of his own action, his salvation is due entirely to the will of God; for the will of God is the Book of Life in which are enrolled all the sons of God." The will of God is related also to the most minute occurrence, to the death of the sparrow and to the fall of the leaf. Some unhappy change in man's relation to nature occurred in connection with the Fall, but nature still serves man's need, though not without his wise cooperation.

It is God also who gives efficiency to the operation of man's mental and spiritual faculties. It is in the light of God's countenance that our minds behold the light of truth. "As God is the light of the potential intellect, causing it to comprehend, so is he the standard of all values, the highest measure of intelligence, the first spark of the will, the primal energizing cause." Our best impulses and the imperative of conscience are due to the direct influence of God upon us.

The term of a man's life depends ultimately upon God, who having united man's soul and body can alone separate them. "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, that is to say, bread sustains a man's life only so long as God thus directs it." "He who died for each of us will also for each of us come and knock, as he ordered, as he promised." Hence death is not, as Aristotle asserts, the king of terrors, since it does not separate us from what we

most love. Instead of being a punishment it is the means of our greatest blessing. It returns the exile to his fatherland. It is escape from the ills of sickness and old age and is admission into larger service. Hence it is well to meditate trustfully upon death, and upon Christ who has made it the gate of paradise to those who trust him, even though they are as unworthy as the repentant thief. Nor should we be disheartened because of the high exactions of the gospel and our feeble desires, since God's grace will abound toward his "little ones," and it is his will, not ours, that saves us.

In emphasizing the immanence of God, Wessel never loses sight of his transcendence. This forms the background against which he presents the divine agency in nature and in human life. He avoided the pantheism of Eckhart and other Mystics and the absolute determinism to which Luther was unfortunately led to commit himself.

II

CONCERNING THE CAUSES, MYSTERIES, AND EFFECTS OF THE INCARNATION AND PASSION OF OUR LORD.

This division consists mainly of eight series of propositions dealing with as many different aspects of the two subjects treated therein. These sets of propositions are of two sorts: those that move altogether in the circle of biblical ideas, and those that are quite independent of any direct scriptural basis. A good example of the former is the series concerning the partaking of the body and blood of Christ, while the latter class is best illustrated by the two allegorical series upon The Combat between the Lamb and the Dragon and The Mystery of the Cross and the Flaming Sword. The latter reveal a mystical bent in Wessel which is usually subordinated to a strictly critical

and logical method. The rigidly individual character of the treatment is indicated by the fact that throughout the section there is reference to but one extra-biblical writer, Augustine.

The discussion opens with ten biblical reasons for the incarnation, e. g. that the Church might have a proper Head, that the School of God might have a Teacher, that for all who sacrifice there might be a Victim, that the Sons of God might have a Firstborn Brother, etc. But the incarnation was no more necessitated by the different needs of man indicated in the ten biblical titles applied to Christ, than by a certain necessity of self-expression on the part of God. The divine nature remained a sealed book—not to man alone but to all God's creatures—till it was revealed in Jesus Christ. Though it was for our salvation that Christ came, yet it was not wholly for this purpose. The incarnation was a necessary expression of the divine nature quite apart from man's need of redemption. "If neither angel nor man had fallen, the Lamb would have reigned equally blessed over them both."

The necessity of the incarnation, from the human standpoint, appears in the fact that it is only through the trustful, loving contemplation of Jesus Christ and his passion that we come into fullest communion with God. "The shortest way to God is sweet and pious meditation on Jesus Christ." Such meditation is also the surest means for the cultivation of the Christian graces, "for nothing is so effective in turning men's minds toward goodness as to be devoutly occupied with the life and passion of our Lord." By this means also are we drawn into close and saving relations to Christ, so that his life is imparted to us. "For the life of Jesus, great and holy before God, is bestowed upon us in so far as we cling to him by reflecting upon, esteeming, and loving him." It is by contemplation of him as "the consubstantial deity" that we come to pos-

sess "the exalted heart" referred to in Psalm LXIV: and "there is no access to the exalted God but by the exalted heart."

The subdivision that deals with the Lamb's battle with the Dragon presents in a somewhat grotesque fashion the contest between evil and the tender love and compassion of God. This conflict took place not merely by God's permission, but by his appointment. "God, cooperating with the Dragon, smote the Lamb!" Although in this combat the Lamb could fight only with the love, patience, meekness, and longsuffering of a lamb, yet by these he utterly overcame the Dragon and all the hosts of evil, so that every knee shall bow to him. "Christ suffered a heavier calamity than the sins of all men deserved, that the grace of God might superabound." "To one who loves the Lamb perfectly the Lamb's cross becomes his own." Such love repeats the Lamb's combat with the Dragon of evil that exists in every nature. Even more fanciful are the propositions relating to the Cross and the Flaming Sword that guarded the way to Paradise. The resemblance of the sword-hilt, with its transverse guard, to the cross had been noticed by the Crusaders and others, who had sometimes sworn by their swords as by the cross. But Wessel's contention would seem to be that the way to the Tree of Life, that is, Christ, is not by the Cross alone, but by the flaming two-edged Sword. In other words, it is inaccessible to the coward or the idler or the indifferent.

In the remaining sections of the chapter we have certain distinctly evangelical views set forth as to the means by which the benefits of Christ's incarnation and passion are to be appropriated. As these views are presented at greater length elsewhere, they require but brief notice here. In an adroit arrangement of our Lord's statements regarding the means by which he imparts his life to his

followers, Wessel presents his own view that the real appropriation of Christ is by loving faith, and that the Eucharist is only one of many means by which we may eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man. Magdalene, through her love and sympathy with Christ's sufferings partook of his life. Such participation is much more efficacious than "if with parched heart and cold will we partake of the Eucharist at the altar ten thousand times!" It is also by faith that the perfect sacrifice of our High Priest becomes ours; thus every son of God may minister the benefits of this sacrifice to himself. This is the Protestant doctrine, elsewhere elaborated, of the priesthood of all believers. Since our regeneration is wrought by God, and our faith is the proof of our regeneration, the strength of our faith, fortunately, is not the measure of the efficacy of God's grace on our behalf. The chapter closes with a résumé of the doctrine of justification as set forth in the Epistle to the Romans. There is little attempt at interpretation of Paul's words and no reference whatever to the creedal statements of this doctrine or the teachings of the theologians concerning it.

III

CONCERNING ECCLESIASTICAL DIGNITY AND POWER.

The main thesis of this chapter, which like the first consists of a somewhat consecutive treatment, is that the Church is under no obligation to accept what the pope teaches or obey what he commands, unless his teachings and commands are in agreement with the gospel. The individual Christian must decide as to this agreement. What is affirmed of the pope is, of course, even more true of the clergy below him. That popes may err is demonstrated in the case of Peter who, as is related in Galatians

II, committed a grave error in principle and conduct and was rebuked and corrected by Paul. This was providentially designed to teach the Church of all ages that her prelates are fallible and subject to correction. Recent examples of papal error are afforded by Benedict and Boniface and John XXIII, who were condemned by the Council of Constance, and by Pius II and Sixtus IV, whose assumptions of unwarranted authority did great injury to the Church.

Having laid down the general principle of the fallibility of prelates, Wessel proceeds to re-interpret certain passages of Scripture which were being adduced in support of the papal claim to unquestioning obedience. He affirms also that the lives of some prelates are "so scandalous that they corrupt by their example more than they edify by their speech, and are no longer to be tolerated." He asserts that in accepting wealth and assuming judicial authority the early Fathers of the Church adopted a wrong course, and that simony and other serious abuses have resulted therefrom. Gerson's opinion that the times and seasons appointed by the Church are only to be observed when they appear reasonable is approved. Such regulations are to be regarded as admonitory, not mandatory; so also are counsels of precaution to those who are weak in the faith. "I am amazed," he adds, "at those who are ready to beget obligation out of admonition." "The flock is possessed of reason and free choice, and is not absolutely given over to the power of the shepherd so that nothing is required of it except to obey him." All authority in matters of religion proceeds from God, and nothing that the prelates enjoin is to be obeyed unless it accords with God's will as indicated in the Gospel, "for it is for God's sake that we believe the Gospel, and for the Gospel's sake that we believe the Church and the pope. We do not believe the Gospel for the Church's sake."

The opinion of the theological expert and the "wise man" is to be preferred to that of the less informed prelate, and the decision of a Church Council to that of a pope. "It belongs to the theologian to define how far the commands of pontiffs are obligatory." "Often a regularly elected pope is a false apostle and a regularly elected prelate is a false pastor."

In affirming that the mutual obligation of religious superior and inferior grows out of a compact, and that when its terms are violated its voluntary obligation ceases he introduces a distinctly democratic conception of the Church. The Mendicants' custom of electing their Superior annually is approved, and the principle is recommended in the election of bishops and civil magistrates, even of monarchs. "Kings should not be obeyed in evil measures; more than that, they may justly be driven from their thrones, unless there is danger that still greater evils would result therefrom." The relation of the pope to the Church may be compared to that of a physician to a patient; if the pope is unskillful or faithless, the patient, that is, the flock, suffers injury in consequence. Thus the keys of the kingdom suffer abuse in his unworthy hands. It is, however, the Church itself that is to blame for the arrogance and corruption of its prelates. The better monasteries afford an illustration of what can be done in the way of selecting good rulers.

IV

CONCERNING THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE, THE KEYS OF THE CHURCH, THE POWER OF BINDING AND LOOSING.

This chapter contains a discussion of ecclesiastical authority. It opens awkwardly with excerpts from two

of Wessel's letters, and consists of many different documents which present the same ideas but from a variety of view points. Its general attitude toward the subjects treated may be inferred from the following statement concerning the binding and loosing power possessed by the apostles: "They had the power to provide the words of the Gospel; they could minister to believers the mysteries of grace, the sacrament of charisms, and the precepts of salvation. All who received these dutifully were loosed from the bonds of captivity to the devil." The clergy have inherited from the apostles a similar power. Those who accept their ministry of the gospel and the sacraments are loosed from the bonds of Satan, those who refuse it are still bound thereby. This is done, however, not by any judicial authority but in the exercise of their ministry.

As to the meaning of "the keys of the kingdom," Wessel adopts Augustine's view that by them is meant the gift of the Holy Spirit who diffuses love in the heart of the recipient, since it is love alone that admits to Christian fellowship; but he adds to the gift of the Spirit the obligation of pastoral service. These were the keys by which Peter was empowered to admit men into the kingdom. The pope shares in Peter's possession of the keys to the extent of his likeness to Peter. "In so far as he is influenced in his actions by love and wisdom, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, he holds the keys, but no further." And the same principle applies to indulgences and excommunications. The pope cannot release a person from any penalties except those that he has himself imposed. He cannot by any exercise of his power exclude a person from communion with God or with other Christians. As to the statement, "Whosesoever sins ye remit, etc." it means no more than that whatever a wise and faithful priest decides in accordance with God's judgment he will find ratified in heaven—and this holds true of the decision of any wise

and righteous person, who acts under the impulse of love.

Confession and the sacraments are doubtless means by which one may grow in grace, but they are not essential to such growth, as is illustrated by Paul of Thebes and other desert saints whose isolation prevented them from receiving the sacraments. "The Catholic Church" is not confined to "the faithful Latins," nor to the subjects of the pope. It includes also many in remote places who have never heard of Rome, but who exercise faith and love and piety; for the bond of unity in the Church is not the pope, but Christ and his omnipresent Spirit. As to excommunication, though a priest may exclude a person from the external fellowship of the Church, "God alone can exclude him from spiritual communion with those who fear and love God."

In the matter of penance, the position is taken that, as God forgives the penitent absolutely, the Church should do the same, and not require submission to penitential discipline as the condition of its absolution. God is not so much pleased with sorrow for past sin as He is with love and joy and the purpose of future obedience. These are "the works meet for repentance." Grief has no moral merit unless it proceed from love, but the grief imposed by penitential discipline proceeds from apprehension and hope deferred. The psychological effect of penance is to keep the penitent forever turning over in his mind the sins that he should forget. "The angels rejoice over the repentant sinner, but the Church imposes griefs upon him." Christ did not require any penance of Magdalene; he said to her, "Go in peace." Nor did the father delay the full restoration of the Prodigal Son. The distinction between the temporal and the eternal penalties of sin is utterly fictitious. The Church, by the exaction of penance, not only detracts from God's free grace to the return-

ing penitent, but exceeds its own authority; "for the priest no more judges or absolves in the sacrament of confession than he purifies in the sacrament of baptism."

Being opposed to all penance, Wessel naturally attacked the system of indulgences. An indulgence may be defined, from one standpoint, as a remission of the penance imposed by the canons. But in as much as the penitent may die with his penance unperformed, an indulgence may avail to end or shorten his stay in purgatory. Some compensation, however, must be made to justice, so from the Treasury of the Church, consisting of the merits of Christ and the saints, sufficient merit is transferred to the account of the penitent to cancel his indebtedness. Such in baldest form is the theory of indulgences and to it at every point Wessel offered objection. He denied that there was any such place or state as purgatory, as ordinarily understood. As for the Treasury of the Church, no doubt there is an enrichment of the life of the Church through its saints and sages, but these are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the pope can neither appraise nor dispense them, nor can he know the need and spiritual receptivity of the penitent. "To give plenary indulgence is to remove every obstacle to the beatific vision"; this requires the possession of perfect love and purity, which God alone can impart.

V

CONCERNING THE COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS, THE TREASURE OF THE CHURCH, ITS SHARING AND DISPENSING, BROTHERHOODS, ETC.

This chapter continues the discussion of the Treasure of the Church, but from a new standpoint, since emphasis is here placed upon the communion of the saints, the distri-

bution of community benefits in monastic brotherhoods, and endowed masses. That communion of the saints which is confessed in the creed is thus defined: "All the saints share in a true and essential unity, even as many as unitedly hold fast to Christ in one faith, one hope, one love." Thus are all true Christians united, regardless of time or space or contentious or even heretical rulers. To the Treasury of the Church as thus unified, every worthy Christian makes some contribution; and in its treasures all who appreciate them share, and share in proportion to their love and desire for them. The only way by which the pope or any one else can admit a person to participation in these treasures is by awakening in his heart a love and desire for them. And if one possess this love and desire, the pope himself cannot exclude him from participation. St. Peter, the first pope, in his inspired Epistle issued the one unique and indubitable bull regarding indulgences, and there sets forth the conditions of plenary admission into the kingdom of God. It is by "the ladder of the ten steps," the ten virtues enumerated in II Peter 1, 5–7; and there is no other way to enter.

"The communion of the saints is a fraternal union in God, a brotherhood, and he shares most in it, who has the greatest love for his Father and his brethren." The same is true of those who endow monastic brotherhoods or establish foundations for the celebration of masses. God alone can estimate the extent to which the patrons or others shall share in their spiritual benefits. For each shall share in proportion to his desire for them, and the increase in the number of participants shall in no wise lessen the blessing which each receives. "A devout woman is no less concerned in what transpires in the mass than is the devout priest, since she shares with equal piety in the body and blood." For the prime "requisite for the effi-

cacy of the sacrament is a hungering and thirsting for the life-giving food and drink."

The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the spiritual value of monasticism. "It is the purpose to have unhindered leisure for God that renders the celibate life praiseworthy." This purpose many have possessed who were so circumstanced in life, as for example the patriarch Abraham and Queen Elizabeth of Hungary, that celibacy was clearly contrary to their appointed duty. These, nevertheless, have the spirit and so the merit of the celibate. For virginity is primarily a purity and devotion of heart; if it is merely of the body it is of small profit. "Married prelates who love celibacy even more than celibates do are held in higher honor than the latter and receive the greater reward." In the case of those, who like David and Magdalene were guilty of sins of impurity, the cleansing power of God's grace is such that after repentance they may become as pure in body and heart as those who have maintained their innocence, since that which is forgiven by God is as if it had never existed.

VI

CONCERNING PURGATORY, ITS NATURE AND FIRE, THE STATE AND PROGRESS OF SOULS AFTER THIS LIFE; THE TWO COMMANDMENTS OF LOVE.

This final chapter deals with the future life, and more especially with purgatory. It contains several series of propositions, and all its parts are but loosely articulated. Since the pope claimed the power to grant indulgences beneficial to those in purgatory, the discussion begins with a statement of his fallibility in judgment and his inability to enable any one to keep the "two commandments of

love" on which all depends. His power is confined to "administering the sacraments, warning, teaching, influencing, directing, and edifying by word and example." "God has reserved to himself the decision in all matters that concern a man's relation to him." The pope, therefore, has no authority to pardon sin, which is an offense against God, or to relax the punishment which God has appointed. In the application of the Treasure of the Church, also, it is God alone who can determine what the share of each should be, since he alone knows the hearts of men.

Purgatory, from which it was taught that indulgences would secure release, is the intermediate state between this life and the final condition of perfect love and blessedness—the beatific vision of God. Wessel insists, however, that it is not a state of punishment for past sins. It is rather a place of joy and of increasing knowledge and love. Man is there still a "wayfarer," and is gradually passing out of the light of the day star and the dawn and sunrise into the perfect day. Purgatory is the "paradise" into which the repentant thief entered at once with Christ. Its only fire is the purifying flame of love for Christ; and its only suffering the deferment of perfect love and union with Christ, the soul's Bridegroom. It is a mistake to suppose that there is, *per se*, any cleansing efficacy in suffering. Otherwise, those who suffer the pains of hell would be the most pure of all God's creatures. Those in purgatory are "in a state, not wretched, not under the rod of a lictor nor in the fire prepared for the devil and his angels, but under the instruction of the Father, who established this state and rejoices in their daily progress."

That the fire of purgatory is generally regarded as penal and material is due to the figurative language of the Scriptures adopted by the Church's teachers, and also to a providential misapprehension of its meaning by the

multitude, who may be deterred from evil ways by the fear of material fire and corporeal punishment. But purgatory is in reality a place of enjoyment, since Christ there reveals himself more fully to his followers than in this life, and by the increasing love of Him which comes with increasing knowledge prepares them for the perfect enjoyment of God. The perplexing passage in the First Epistle of St. Peter in which Christ is represented as having preached to spirits in prison is made to support this conception of purgatory. Christ is "the great Evangelist" to purgatory. There he preaches "the Eternal Gospel," not to imperfect Christians only, but to the antediluvians, to those of Old Testament times, and to the heathen. Thus every man either in this life or the next will have opportunity to hear his voice and accept him.

In the series of propositions concerning the Eternal Gospel a glimpse is given into a wide field of speculation in which it appears that Wessel, who had the optimism of those who magnify the divine sovereignty, was willing to follow in the direction taken centuries before by Origen. "The purpose of God has not been frustrated with the result that he who wishes all men to be saved would forget or abandon his work!" In the future life under more favorable conditions, with Christ himself as the Evangelist, the Eternal Gospel (the message of God's saving purpose in its simplest, most elemental, most universal, most persuasive form) will be preached to all those who have not rejected Christ or such light as they had in this life. This is not universalism, nor second probation in its ordinary sense; but it nevertheless opens a wide door of hope for the salvation of the race. Concerning prayers for the dead, which he did not wish offered on his own behalf, he intimates that they may constitute a form of profitable meditation, that is, they may react helpfully

upon the suppliant, "since it is holy and profitable to wish what God wishes"; yet he offers no reason to suppose that prayers on their behalf will affect the condition of the departed.

The Letters

"I am sending you, most excellent Sir, the Homilies of John Chrysostom, which I trust you will read with delight, since golden words have always pleased you more than golden coin."

Alexander Hegius' Letter to Wessel

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THE translation that follows has been made with the use of three different copies of Wessel's works in the original Latin. Of these, the one that has every appearance of being the oldest consists of four separate pamphlets bound in a single volume. First in order comes what is generally considered to be the earliest edition of the *Farrago*. It bears no date, nor is there any clue to the name of the printer or to the place of printing. Attached to this are Wessel's letters to Bernard of Meppen, to "a certain man," to John of Amsterdam, and lastly his briefer letter to Hoeck. The second pamphlet presents Wessel's *De Oratione Dominica* in full. The third contains his *De Sacramento Eucharistiae*, followed by extracts from *De Magnitudine Passionis* and *De Incarnatione Verbi*. The fourth, which is prefaced by Luther's commendatory letter, consists of Wessel's letter to Engelbert of Leyden, Hoeck's letter to Wessel, the latter's long reply to Hoeck, his letter to Gertrude Reyniers, John of Amsterdam's letter to Bernard of Meppen, and Wessel's letter to Ludolph van Veen. Last of all according to the title-page should come Anthony de Castro's attack on the positions regarding indulgences that Wessel had taken in his long letter to Hoeck. But by an error in the binding, to which attention is called in a note by the publisher, it appears immediately after the *De Oratione Dominica*.

The type, the initial letters, the abbreviations, and the orthography of the four sections of this volume clearly indicate that they were all printed by the same publishing-

house. The first pamphlet, however, exists as a separate booklet, which, as stated above, is believed to antedate all other editions of Wessel's works. It is altogether probable, therefore, that the three following pamphlets were issued separately from the same press, but not till after the appearance of the Adam Petri edition described below, and were then bound up with the first pamphlet. The British Museum Catalogue describes in detail a copy of Wessel's works that is identical in contents with this volume.

The second text used in the translation was printed by Adam Petri at Basel in 1522. It contains all the treatises and letters found in the first and fourth pamphlets mentioned above with the exception of Anthony de Castro's *Impugnatorium*, and closes with a letter from the publisher to Dr. Conrad Faber.

The third volume in the hands of the translator was a copy of the complete edition of Wessel's surviving works, published by Peter Pappus at Groningen in 1614. This is the only edition that contains the *Scala Meditationis* and Hardenberg's biography of Wessel. The latter as being the most valuable source of information concerning the life of Wessel has been included in the translation and follows the *Farrago*.

The textual variations in these three editions, which are collated in the Critical Appendix, are relatively few and for the most part unimportant. Whenever practicable the reading of the earliest edition has been given preference to either of the others.

In addition to the letters already mentioned, the translation includes Wessel's letter to "a nameless nun" and Alexander Hegius' letter to Wessel, which are found only in the 1614 edition, and also a letter from David of Burgundy to Wessel, quoted by Muurling in his *Commentatio de Wesseli Vita*.

The translator's aim has been to render the Latin with literal exactness and to reproduce the style of the author as far as possible without sacrificing the English idiom, hoping thereby to place the reader, to some degree, on an equality with those who have access to the original. To attain this end, time and labor have been given without stint. During the five years that have elapsed since the translation was undertaken, it has passed through no less than four revisions at the hands of the translator and the editor.

Classical scholars might naturally suppose that peculiar difficulties would be attached to the translation of Wessel's medieval Latin. Such, however, has not been the case. While Wessel's Latinity is by no means Ciceronian, it is tolerably pure, as is evidenced by the fact that scarcely more than a score of words in the *Farrago* are missing in Harper's Latin Dictionary. The chief difficulty in the translation was due to the occurrence of various technical terms pertaining to the Scholastic philosophy. Many such terms, though still employed in modern philosophical treatises, have undergone a subtle change of meaning. In a few instances, in order to guard against any possible misapprehension, the Latin words have been inserted in parentheses. Of the other difficulties incident to the translation one deserves special mention, namely, the identification of obscure persons and places. These abound in the Introduction to the Groningen edition and more particularly in Hardenberg's sketch of Wessel's life and writings.

Primarily Wessel was a theologian not an essayist, a disputant and not a rhetorician. Like Augustine, he was so deeply absorbed in the religious controversies of his time that he gave scant heed to rhetorical embellishment. His was the argumentative style of the day, marked by much repetition and hard hammering on the positions of

his opponent. Nevertheless it would be doing Wessel injustice to give the reader the impression that he was nothing more than a vigorous theological disputant. In the perusal of his writings one cannot fail to see emerging, clear in line and color, the portrait of a man unusually keen and logical, an omnivorous reader, a thorough student of philosophy, an independent and courageous thinker, and above all, an unswerving seeker after the truth, no matter whither the search for it might lead him. As a torch-bearer in the darkness of the Pre-Reformation Period, he deserved, in no small measure, to be called—as he was by some of his contemporaries—"*Lux Mundi.*"

Grateful acknowledgment of indebtedness should be made to Mr. A. J. F. van Laer, Archivist of the Division of History and Archives in the New York State Education Department for valuable assistance in identifying many persons and localities in the Netherlands; to Dr. Julius A. Bewer of Union Theological Seminary for interpreting certain Hebrew expressions found in *De Sacramento Eucharistiae;* and to Professors Charles E. Durham and George L. Burr of Cornell University for throwing light upon several obscure passages. Particularly is the translator under deep obligation to the editor of these volumes, to whose keen criticism and constant collaboration whatever merit the translation possesses is largely due.

Jared W. Scudder.

Albany, N. Y.,
October, 1916.

I

MARTIN LUTHER IN A LETTER PREFACING CERTAIN MINOR WORKS OF WESSEL

MARTIN LUTHER gives greeting to the Christian Reader.

Once, when the word of the Lord was precious and there was no open vision, and the prophets had been slain almost to a man by the wicked Jezebel, the prophet Elijah, the Tishbite, thought that he only was left. Therefore, weary of life, he wished to die; being alone, he felt unequal to the task of bearing the intolerable burden of his wicked people and their leaders. For he did not know that seven thousand men were still left to the Lord, and that Obadiah was safe with one hundred prophets in hiding.

This, if I may compare the small with the great, seems to me to be a parable of our own age. For I, being forced through some providence of God into the public arena, felt that I was alone in my fight with these monsters of indulgences and pontifical laws and so-called theology. And yet I have always had sufficient courage to cause me to be accused everywhere of being too biting and unrestrained, because of the great faith with which I was burning. Still I always desired to be taken away—even I—from the midst of my Baalites, and escaping my civic obligations, to live to myself in some corner, in utter despair of being able to accomplish anything against the brazen foreheads and iron necks of impiety.

But lo! word comes to me that the Lord has saved a remnant even at this time, and that His prophets are safe

in hiding. And this is not only told me, but to my joy it is proven to me. For behold! a Wessel has appeared, whom they call Basil, a Frisian from Groningen, a man of remarkable ability and of rare and great spirit; and it is evident that he has been truly taught of the Lord, even as Esaias prophesied the Christians would be. For no one could think that he received these doctrines from men, any more than I mine. If I had read his works earlier, my enemies might think that Luther had absorbed everything from Wessel, his spirit is so in accord with mine.

But now my joy and courage begin to increase, and I have not the slightest doubt that I have been teaching the truth, since he, living at so different a time, under another sky, in another land, and under such diverse circumstances, is so consistently in accord with me in all things, not only as to substance, but in the use of almost the same words.

I wonder, however, what ill fortune has prevented this most Christian author from being widely read. Possibly it was because he lived free from blood and war, in which particular alone he differs from me. Or he may have been overwhelmed by fear of our Jews who with their wicked inquisitions seem to have been born for the purpose of pronouncing all the best books heretical, in order that their own Aristotelian and hypercritical writers may be set forth as Christian. But through the deliverance of God they are now ending in confusion.

Therefore peruse his works, pious reader; and read with discernment. For in discernment lies his special excellence; this he displays to a remarkable degree. And those who are offended by excessive harshness in me or by too great elegance of style in others, will have nothing to complain of here. His style is unpolished, in accordance with his age, while he treats his subject with moderation and fidelity. If Vergil found gold in the dungheaps of Ennius, the reader of our Wessel will discover how a

theologian may adorn his writings with the riches of eloquence.

May the Lord Jesus add many other Basils to this one.

Farewell, Christian brother.

Wittenberg, the IVth day before the Kalends of August.

II

ADAM PETRI SENDS GREETINGS TO DOCTOR CONRAD FABER, WHO REFLECTS HONOR UPON THEOLOGIANS, AND INDEED UPON ALL LEARNED MEN

BEHOLD, most learned sir, what an author certain persons have put out of the way! And the reason for it is clear. But God, who sets bounds to the fury of the ungodly, just as he does to the waves of the sea, did not allow his works to perish utterly.

What, I ask, have you ever seen, except the Books of the Bible, as they are called, that sets forth the whole work of Christ and the Scriptures with clearer procfs, or fights against those impostors, the enemies of God with stronger arguments? What have you seen that is more effective in shaking human traditions and driving them into obscurity? And there is no surer proof than this that his work is from God. For man-made doctrines inevitably beget disbelief of Christ as the Word of God. But when the sun rises, all other stars hide themselves.

Therefore I would especially desire him to be read by those who become puffed up with their wisdom and learning and then proceed to mould the life of Christians by their philosophical reasoning;—those, I say, to whom in theology all deference is paid to-day in almost the entire world. I usually liken such men to swallows and mice, which, although they are domestic and seem tame, cannot be tamed. For I have seen that it is impossible for them truly to know Christ on account of the riches, so to

speak, of their learning or sanctity, which are much harder to renounce than material wealth, because they cling more closely to us. And yet these men are commonly regarded as great theologians. Indeed their false doctrine at first sight is not far removed from the truth either in appearance or name; just as the Styx fountain does not differ from other waters in odor or color; yet to drink of it means death. Nevertheless, if they will only read this author, I have hope that he will prove convincing along all lines, he penetrates so deeply into the nature of things, human and divine. Otherwise, I can but imagine how much men of this sort will hinder Christ. For although they are learned, they have not as yet gained firm footing on the outer threshold.

But further, I would wish him to be read by those who —destitute of love and puffed up with knowledge—offend the "little ones" in Christ by speaking rashly on subjects which never ought to be generally discussed; and thereby do very great harm to the Church of Christ. They are like trees in a garden which hinder others by their too luxuriant branches. To these Christ said—Matt. XVIII and Mark IX—"It is better to have thy hand cut off and enter into life maimed, to have thy foot cut off and enter halt, or to have thine eye plucked out and enter with one eye, than to be cast whole into hell fire."

Therefore, just as we have a living example of Christian earnestness and moderation in yourself, we have—so to speak—a similar glorified example in Wessel. Indeed it is on this very account—endowed as you yourself are with every theological gift—that you have deemed him worthy to be called "The greatest theologian."

Farewell in God.

III

A LETTER OF MASTER WESSEL TO THE HONORABLE LORD MASTER LUDOLPH VAN VEEN, MOST WORTHY DEAN OF THE CELEBRATED CHURCH AT UTRECHT AND DOCTOR OF BOTH LAWS

It is not this time because of the agreement that exists between us, but because the fires are almost blazing around me, that I am impelled not merely to write, but to consult and importune you, as a lawyer and a faithful friend; and also as one who in early youth was harassed by like—nay more truly by the same—misfortunes and conflicts as those by which I fear I shall now be troubled; for experience makes one particularly wise in counsel.

You have heard of the peril of that venerable man, Master John of Wesel. Now, although—as you have heard me say repeatedly—I do not like his absurdities, which deviate from the truth and are a stumbling block to the people; yet his learning and unusually keen faculties are such that I cannot help loving the man and sympathizing with him in his misfortune. Oh, what an advantage it would have been to him, as I often said *inter nos* at Paris, if he had first been trained thoroughly, as we were, in the studies both of the Realists and the Formalists! For in that case he would not have been incautious and off his guard, but as though from a citadel and watch-tower he would have foreseen the coming assaults.

From my most faithful friends I learn that he has been convicted to die by fire. This may be incorrect, since he,

being convicted in a disputation, now acknowledges his error; and hence it follows either that he was not stubborn, or if he was, that he has ceased to be so. I am not so much surprised at his being condemned to the fire; but I think the methods pursued by his judges ought to be laughed to scorn. However, perhaps, as some say, he was convicted because he did not confess; or possibly was both impudent and obstinate in manner, or possibly—to extenuate the offense of a most friendly man—he merely defended some error, and was therefore condemned by the judges in accordance with the rules of the Sacred Canons.

Be that as it may, I am nevertheless grieved at the fate of the man, and especially of such a man as he is. I have often feared his inconsiderate and rash manner of speech. For although his teaching had some scholastic subtlety and possibly at times contained some catholic truth, yet to make such statements as he did to the unlearned crowd and to those who were incapable of understanding them caused serious scandal to simple minded people and was altogether odious.

Besides, from the same friends I learn that as soon as the inquisitor has disposed of him, he will descend with an investigation upon me. And in this case, although I do not fear the proceedings in the least, still I should have to endure disquietude, suspicion, expense, trouble, and—more than that—even calumny; especially from the Abbot of the Old Mount and from some Doctors of Cologne, whose hatred or rather whose envy you may readily guess from your own misfortunes,—I speak to one who has had experience with them. And so that I may pass through their persecutions—if they ever attempt them—as over a shallow ford and with light step, I await your advice in regard to expecting and undergoing them. I am looking however for as speedy a reply as possible from you with an account of what happened to you in a similar

affair and what you would advise me to do, for fear that some sudden attack may confound me in my defenselessness and ignorance of court trials. I beg of you to make reply to me quickly, in order that you may abundantly refresh one who thirsts for your advice and who trusts no less to the wisdom of your counsels than to the justice of his cause. I do not fear anything that I may have to undergo for the purity of the faith, if only there be no calumny. As I have revealed these matters to you in confidence, conceal them, I entreat you, from all others.

Written at Zwolle on the 6th of April.

IV

WESSEL OF GRONINGEN SENDS GREETING IN JESUS, THE TRUE SAVIOUR, TO THE HONORABLE AND DEVOUT SISTER, THE MAIDEN, GERTRUDE REYNIERS, NUN AT KLAARWATER

You inquire about a certain ghost which is the subject of much talk among the people. Assertions of this kind should not be regarded as important by serious-minded hearers. Concerning such matters much is written and related that is foreign to the Gospel and the Sacred Canon. But even if an angel from heaven were to come and report anything opposed to that which in permanent form has been handed down to us, it ought not to be accepted.

You have read, I suppose, of that Doctor, a theologian of Paris, who came back from the dead. When he was asked what was left of his once splendid knowledge, he replied that he knew nothing but punishment. This story and others like it that have been recorded seem to be confirmed by the fact that his statement agrees with Solomon's words in the Sacred Canon, "For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, in the grave." Indeed from this one would naturally conclude that no rational cognition is assured there. But this is obviously contrary to theological truth concerning the most holy and clear cognition of souls there. For Scripture repeatedly says, "The ungodly shall see and know that he is God." Likewise the Lord Jesus, when he comes to judge, will receive an account of every idle word in the presence of all and

his judgment will be as clear as the noonday. The Apostle also says the Lord Jesus was given a name above every name, that in his name the knee even of those under the earth should bow. Hence the spirits in the lower world have a name for all things, but above all the name of Jesus, and—bitterest of all for them—that name so exalted that they know it is brighter than the noonday light, and are forced to admit that the Lord Jesus, whom they all hate and envy most fiercely, is in the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, as a rule I regard such revelations and visions as dangerous and illusory, unless they are tempered and qualified with a large grain of salt. For what revelation have they ever made of the hidden wisdom, upon which piety and love may be clearly and surely built? They commend the piety, alms, pilgrimages, fastings, and prayers of the people. But these are also commended by the Sacred Canon. The fact is that the Gospel has grown so old to us that we believe some one who returns and brings us tidings of the dead rather than the prophets and Moses, rather even than the apostles and evangelists. Such was the opinion and judgment of the rich banqueter in the lower world after his burial. For he thought that the living would believe, if one from the dead went and testified to them. Abraham, however, clearly opposed this, saying that if they would not believe Moses and the prophets, neither would they believe, if one went from the dead. You have therefore, an opinion on these matters expressed, not by myself, but by Abraham, by the Lord Jesus. As a rule, trifling, curious, prurient hearers are more excited by the novelty of such an idea than they are aroused by the truth of the Gospel, as they are vagrants by nature, idle and garrulous rather than industrious and fruitful.

And yet I do not on this account reject revelations and

visions that harmonize with the truth and conduce to piety. Not as if they constituted the hinge or anchor of faith; but on the same ground that I hold that writings outside of the Canon may be read unto edification. In most such visions however we must not ignore the astuteness of the angel Satan, who transforms himself into an angel of light. Serious men should gravely suspect that he is concerned in all such accounts. For he often includes much that is true, in order that he may stealthily inweave a single falsehood. As it is, it seems to me that this has been his business among you, for instead of recognizing that redeemed souls released from this body of sin by the death that is precious in the Lord have already opened the door to the Son of man coming at the appointed time as though to their bridegroom, and have longingly received him, faithfully espoused themselves to him, and are ardently clinging to him, such visitations imply that the dead still weaken and retard their progress by concerning themselves with our infirmities and worthlessness.

With regard to the study of logic, I do not deny that it contributes to scholastic discipline. But I do not see what it adds to the consolation of monastic solitude and spiritual exaltation, especially in the case of maidens like yourself. As a rule it has been given to your entire sex to glow with eager longing rather than to be distinguished for judgment or discernment. Hence I think the highest logic for you consists in prayer. For the promise, "Seek and ye shall find," has not been given in vain to you. Long before you could learn logic, you will have prevailed through the prayer of faith with the Teacher of truth to grant you all needful truth. It is not expedient that the eye of the guileless dove be confused by too many things. They that too curiously consider the things that stand about their pathway, press on to the end the more slowly. Acquire love through prayer, and you will have

obtained all the fruit of logic, i. e. knowledge and wisdom. Chaste maidens who are betrothed to the Lord Jesus, the supreme, the inestimable lover, and are at the last to show themselves not having spot or wrinkle, should seek no other logic than faithful love, which in this life is granted to but few, indeed to very few. For all who pant for that true wedding I think that logic is less useful than to coo and call constantly with the dove in the crannies of the rock, to knock at the ears of their good and great lover, in order that by the sacrifice of their love he may make them worthy of his love. For if they do not love when he comes, he will exclude them as anathema. The love of Jesus is a wedding ring, without which every betrothed maiden will be deemed unworthy of the marriage chamber.

To meditate on this, to esteem it, to pant for it, to hunger and thirst for it, to seek it with inmost longing, I think will be the highest logical wisdom possible to us here in the light of the lamp. To speak figuratively, just as the Scholastics approach philosophy through logic, so through prayers and groans and pious sighs all betrothed maidens have a straight, easy, and sure path to the highest wisdom of nuptial glory.

I am very much pleased with your progress in the study of literature, but only as I see that it leads more expeditiously to your holy wedding since all your sighing for it now, as your mind broadens, shall like sparks be changed into spheres and vast globes of glowing love. No one can be considered to live, who does not love. For lukewarmness, like sleep, is the image of death, and he only lives completely who loves completely; he alone is happy who, having obtained his desire, loves worthily.

The haste of my messenger constrains me to shorten this letter. I beg you to commend me most cordially to the holy mother, Elithia. Farewell.

V

LETTER TO A NAMELESS NUN

To his sister of the Convent, Wessel sends cordial greetings in Jesus' love. I cannot tell you with what joy I was filled, when by your letter I saw that you were girded with such courage for the battle, ready even to give up your life for Christ. For, indeed, this is the way by which a soul enters upon life eternal, provided it enters with true discernment. Many there are who start upon an arduous life without foresight, and unless these are directed in the right way, they will stray and fall.

Do not, my dearest sister, so misunderstand my words regarding the pursuit of cleanness and purity of heart as to think that you, in your own purity, can be found pure in the sight of God, since all our righteousness is as filthy rags in His sight. Do not therefore waste your strength to no purpose. Your body is frail; you are of the tender sex; do not undertake what all of David's warriors, the picked and stoutest men of Israel, could not perform. No one shall be saved by his own merits or his own righteousness. There is only one sacrifice of the great High Priest, and only so far as we partake of this are we sanctified and pure in heart.

You will say to me, "How shall I partake of this sacrifice; we rarely go to communion, not oftener than once a fortnight, or occasionally once a week?" It was not so much this outward participation that I urged; but rather

that you should often bathe and wash and be baptized in the blood of the Lamb, who was born for you and given for your every necessity. At that time I promised you only one thing, and I now repeat that I do not merely assure you that as often as you pray the Father through the sacrifice of his Son offered for your sanctification you are sanctified. I would affirm even more than that, and assure you that if with pious intention you muse upon your lover and betrothed, who was given for your salvation, you not only actually embrace him, but since he dwells in the banquet-room of your heart, you have eaten of his flesh and drunk of his blood. And it is only as you thus eat and drink that you can obtain eternal life. But if you do this frequently you will have life, the more abundant life, abiding in you, since he is the way, the truth, and the life. Thus he himself is our righteousness and purity of heart. If you think and reflect upon him often, you will be pure in heart.

This is the better part which was chosen by that wise lover, Magdalene, who sitting at the feet of Jesus, listened to his words, intent in her longing and wearied by no labor. Only be sure, however, to take as provision for your entire journey Christ's parting command, "Take, eat this body which is given for you, and drink this blood which is poured out for you. Do this in remembrance of me." For if he himself was born, given, and made unto us redemption, wisdom, justification, and sanctification from God, the Father, we can, by simply meditating upon him, find meat and bread for the very life of our souls.

What then is the use of all this needless hardship in trying to attain the impossible? Through desire for Christ and pious meditation upon him it is within our power to have righteousness and purity of heart, if we but wish it. These things are obtained, not by struggle and conflict, but by quiet longing, by sweet tears, by faith-

ful kisses upon the feet of Jesus. There is no necessity for severe fasts or the wearing of a rough goat's-hair garment. The worthy fruit of repentance requires no bodily severities, but only that which is necessary for us all, the piety that availeth for all things.

Be regular in the observance of your duties in your cloister home, and that will suffice for bodily discipline. In the matter of sleep and food and drink and clothing, follow the common usage and be content. But in your reflection and meditation on the Lord Jesus never be content. By so doing you will often have him as the sweet guest of your heart, and by his counsel he will faithfully control all your thoughts. In your confessions, I advise you to do just as your faithful Mother Superior and leader shall counsel. And you can be content with the thought that you are ready to confess orally, when it is expedient. For we are not bound to confess except for our good, and for our progress in salvation.

Farewell, my sweet sister in Christ.

VI

A LETTER OF MASTER WESSEL OF GRONINGEN TO BROTHER BERNARD OF MEPPEN, REGULAR CANON, CONCERNING THE PROGRESS AND THE STATE OF SOULS AFTER THIS LIFE; WHAT—AND HOW—WE SHOULD PRAY FOR THEM, ETC.

If salvation is real, Jesus truly saves his people from their sins; if it is perfect, he completely saves them from their sins, and therefore he saves them from all sin. It is however a great sin for a person not to return the love of one who so loves him. When Jesus comes and knocks, one does not immediately open to him, unless with the knocking there suddenly comes from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind. Then if he opens his heart, he is clothed with power from on high, enabling him to love his loving Saviour, and to receive him worthily in the spirit of justice and burning that washes away "the filth of the daughters of Zion,"—the filth, I say, of those who do not love him who so loves them. Then they receive him in their arms and bless God in a loud voice; and, praying that he will let them depart in peace according to the word of the Lord, they give thanks because they have seen the salvation which saves from sin, the salvation which has been prepared before the face of all peoples.

Now all this they do in the light of the rising day-star, when they are not yet released from the body. But when they obtain their wish at the hand of that Saviour, they are loosed from the prison of their captivity, from the

flesh of sin, from the body of corruption; and that too by the death so precious in the sight of the Lord by which those who are saved are set free and established in the great life of wisdom, glory, and love,—established so firmly that thenceforth no creature shall be able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

In our earthly life everything is done as by lamplight through the Lamb's names and messengers. Yet, when the Son of Man comes with the sound of the rushing of a mighty wind, and we are clothed with power from on high, the name of the Lamb is changed for his appearance; and he, who before was beautiful by reason of his exalted name, becomes in the light of the rising day-star a form, more beautiful than any of the sons of men. Surely therefore, when—by the death that is precious in the sight of the Lord—the saints are freed from all their infirmities here, and are quickened and conformed to that holy life, as happy wayfarers they shall pass into the dawn of the approaching day, until the sun shall rise clearly before them. Then they no longer walk in the ways of the Lord, neither do they run, nor leap; nay I think I should speak too moderately, were I to say, they fly; rather I believe they are caught up like lightning flaming with love in that wide-spreading morn of the great day that shall dawn before the rising of the sun, that day that shall spread to the farthest confines of space.

If such experiences shall follow, when I am done with this wretched life, I shall wish that which God wills for me. He, however, will wish me to advance out of the dawning day into the light of the rising sun. For this I ought to pray. To this very end the angels pray for the dead. And we too pray for the angels, praying that their blessed desires for us may be fulfilled. To this very end the whole Church prays, or ought to pray. The dead pray for us, that we may pass into the happy fellowship of the saints.

The prayer of the angels for the dead is most blessed. The prayer of the dead for us is more blessed than our own —whether it be for ourselves or for them. But with regard to those, who—by the testimony of one who so loves them—are altogether spotless and perfect and yet are still wayfarers, in that they seek and find not, they call and he does not answer,—if anyone prays that these be loosed from their sins, even though this prayer proceed out of piety, it nevertheless has error mingled with it. As to this, I have said that I doubted whether I wanted any such prayer of the pious to be offered for me when dead. I do wish that they would pray for my sanctification, and for my progress into the light of the approaching day that shall shine brighter and brighter; that the holy name of the sun that is soon to rise for me may change into the blessed appearance of the sun that has risen (even as the name of the Lamb has changed into his happy appearance), so that I may actually see all the treasures of God's house in Christ,—those vast treasures of wisdom, glory, and love. For such blessings I wish they would pray, despising all created glory, but caught up in their desire for that uncreated Sun whom they have not yet found, because when called he does not yet answer their prayers.

This is what the blessed angels pray for on behalf of those who are already happy. This is what those who are already happy pray for, that they themselves may be beatified. This is what we, miserable creatures, ought to pray for in behalf of the happy.

Nevertheless we ought not to mingle error with our piety; but so to pray, that through our wisdom and uprightness the fervor of our prayer may ascend and be kindled like incense in the sight of the Lord. This is baptism in the Holy Spirit, by which they were baptized for the dead in the early Church. For if any were baptized otherwise, attention was called to it, as I think, by

the following question, "Why then were they baptized for them?", as if to say, their baptism suffered loss, and was useless in so much, etc.

Propositions.

1. Praying for the dead is holy meditation.
2. Holy is the desire of those who pray for the living.
3. In so far as they are holier than we, their desire for us is holier than ours for them.
4. It is holy meditation for us to pray that the saints may receive the "double stole" more quickly.
5. Holy is our desire for the angels that they may receive the fruit of their ministry, the object of their prayers.
6. If, however, anyone prays for the dead, who are like the bride described in Canticles, altogether fair and undefiled,—though his prayer proceed out of piety—nevertheless he errs if he asks that they be loosed from their sins, just as he errs if he asks that an angel be freed from sorrow.
7. Our piety, when we pray for them, is pleasing to them.
8. Their most acceptable love profits us, when they make intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. This they could not do while in this life. Their groanings there, how unutterable here!
9. So far as our praying proceeds out of piety, it is holy. But so far as it contains error, it is not holy. It is therefore holy, and not holy: like propositions, which being built partly upon two others,—one affirmative and the other negative,—are termed "participants."

VII

A LETTER BY THE SAME WESSEL CONCERNING ZEAL AND PIETY IN THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH; CONCERNING THE FRUITS OF HONORABLE STRUGGLE IN THE ARENA OF TRUTH

WESSEL sends faithful greeting to Brother John of Amsterdam.

MY DEAREST JOHN:—

Frequently recalling how you received my reply to your doubts about the immediate passage (into glory) of those who like Stephen and Lawrence die for Christ, I have had no little desire again to ascertain your thought in regard to it. For with desire I desire to battle among men of understanding in the arena of truth, wishing not only to be victorious, but also to advance and grow. It is indeed by such battling for truth, that I—whether conquering or conquered—advance toward the freedom of the sons of God. For the promise has been made to truth, that it shall free those who stand upon it. This is the struggle, in which the Lord Jesus has commanded us to engage, that we may enter the kingdom. I therefore ask that we as at the beginning continue to struggle in search of the truth. Nor do I wish you merely to assent to my replies, and thus to find rest from your soul's disturbance without being satisfied. But whatever disturbs you, in season and out of season, be urgent and write again; and not only you, but let all who are with you be equally urgent. For

it is my firm belief that where two or three are gathered together to seek the truth, there the Way, the Truth, and the Life will be in the midst of them. And, in this darksome world, how can we better gather to seek the truth than in a pious search and struggle for it? The chaplain of Adwerd has promised that, if I would meet him, he would cure me simply by a discussion. I beg you, who dwell on Mount St. Agnes, if you wish me to be cured, to battle often with me and not to desist, until—conquering or conquered—you extort a confession of the truth that shall clear away all doubts. Hence, in order to sow the seed of further fruitful discussion between us, I am sending, by my Henry, the beginning of the disputation that has arisen with the chaplain in regard to the necessity of wayfarers being made perfect, that you may ruminate upon it. Bite, chew, taste, and test it again and again. Now, farewell.

VIII

A LETTER OF MASTER WESSEL CHALLENGING A CERTAIN MAN TO A DISCUSSION CONCERNING THE FULFILLMENT OF SACRED SCRIPTURE: CONCERNING THE IMPERFECTION OF THE HOLY APOSTLES AND MARTYRS, WHO EVEN AFTER THIS LIFE WERE NOT FORTHWITH CROWNED, BUT STILL NEEDED TO ADVANCE AND GROW IN PURGATORY, I. E. IN PARADISE

HEALTH to you in the outer and inner man, but especially and perfectly in the latter.

You sent word by my Henry that if I were close at hand, you would cure me by a discussion—which you were unable at such a distance to arrange. And, indeed, I believe you would, because I delight in discussions between the keenest intellects. For through them I always either learn or teach, knowing that I am a debtor both to the wise, of whom I may learn, and to those who are desirous to learn, whom I may teach. Therefore I will scatter the seed of discussion between us.

I here place before you for your consideration the following opinion of mine which has been submitted to the decision of the Lord Abbot,—an opinion concerning both purgatory and indulgences. You have known of it for a long time. I now set forth the arguments pertaining to it.

First, the Scripture is a connected whole, every part of which must be inspired by the Holy Spirit, and therefore must be true. For the whole is not true if even the smallest part is false. Now in this connected whole there

is one part which states that all the law must be so fulfilled that not one jot or one tittle shall be lacking. Hence all Scripture that is divinely inspired must be fulfilled perfectly, so that not one jot nor one tittle shall be lacking. According to this same Scripture the Holy Spirit—as stated by Paul—espoused us all to one husband, Christ, to whom he might present us as a pure virgin, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Now this espousal was made, not by Paul, but by the Holy Spirit through Paul. And yet even Paul did not find that the espousal was perfectly accomplished in himself in this life, so that not one jot or one tittle was lacking, or so that he had neither spot nor wrinkle. For he confesses—with regard to himself—that he knows not how to pray as he ought. Hence a large jot, a large tittle was lacking in his knowledge, since, though he was caught up to the third heaven, he did not attain to such perfection that he knew what he ought to pray for. And so long as he lacked this perfect knowledge, he could not pray as he ought. Hence also he exclaimed that he was a wretched man, saying, "Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" While he claims to be free, claims liberty, he still groans at the slavery of corruption and death and is unwilling to be subjected to vanity, as being one whom the truth of this knowledge has not yet set free. Hence he was still a slave, a bondsman under the law of perfect liberty.

In the Canticles the bridegroom addresses his bride, who was no longer betrothed to him for some future espousal, but in an actual and present espousal. And this bridegroom, who cannot speak falsely and cannot be distrusted by the bride, repeatedly honors her with titles of praise that truly describe her at that very time, declaring that she is fair, and saying: "Behold thou art fair, my love; behold thou art my beautiful dove, my fair one; rise, make haste, come. Rise, make haste, my love,

my betrothed, and come, my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the cranny of the wall. Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy sweet voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." Now what countenance is so comely that not one jot or one tittle is lacking, unless it be that of the inward man that loves God? And what voice is so sweet, unless it be in the song of one who loves truly and purely? Of one, I say, who sings "the Song of Songs"? For if it is not true, if it is not pure and sincere, he falsely calls it "the Song of Songs." In like manner this staunch lover in his praises declares that she "comes up through the wilderness like a pillar of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant." 4th: He says that she is a mountain of myrrh and a hill of frankincense, again exclaiming, "How fair thou art, my love; how fair thou art." 5th: "Thou art all fair, my love; and there is no spot in thee." 6th: "He says that "the fragrance of her oils surpasses all spices." 7th: That "her lips drop as the honeycomb." 8th: That "the smell of her garments is like the smell of frankincense and the sweetest incense." 9th: "Thou art fair, my love, sweet and comely as Jerusalem; terrible as an army with banners." 10th: "My dove, my undefiled, is but one; she is the only one of her mother; she is the choice one of her that bare her." 11th: (Beautiful are) "her steps in the sandals of a prince's daughter." 12th: "How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!" And there, recounting her fragrance in detail, he praises her from head to foot.

Now contrast these encomiums of the bridegroom concerning his bride with the commands of the Bridegroom, who directs us to pray daily that our debts be forgiven. It is obvious that, in this life, even Peter, Paul, John, and James, the brother of the Lord, were debtors: Peter, who walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel.

Paul, too,—together with all who attained the first fruits of the Spirit,—though not of his own will, was still subjected to vanity. And John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, confesses thus for himself and for all the apostles, "If we say that we have no sin, we are liars, and the truth is not in us." And James says, "In many things we all stumble." No one in this life, therefore, has received from the Bridegroom such praises as are vouchsafed in the Song of Songs. And yet one ought to receive them, whenever he is like the bride that is described there. It follows that the bride attained this brightness, fairness, and beauty somewhere else. Hence this one life in the body is not the whole way for us. For evidently the bride was not in her own country when she complained, "I sought him, but I found him not; I called him, but he gave me no answer." But she is to become happy in that home, where no one shall complain of not having seen and not having found; where none shall say, "Oh that thou wert as my brother, that I might find thee without and might kiss thee." For the marriage there is a blessed one, with the kiss, mouth to mouth,—one spirit, not so much in embraces, as one spirit in a blessed union.

The bride, therefore, is still a wayfarer after this life. At first indeed she must be purified from hay, stubble, and wood by the burning and consuming fire of love. Afterward she burns with pure love, until she receives a perfect bride's true praise from the lips of the truest and wisest Bridegroom. Then—by the decision of that Bridegroom, whom she hitherto has not found and who has given her no answer—her perfect love for the first-born Brother, her perfect love for God, will be regarded as worthy of a place and mansion in the Father's house.

Peter, Paul, John, and James therefore were not found worthy of such praises immediately after this life. Neither the first martyr, Stephen, nor the famous laureate, Law-

rence, nor that renowned victor, Vincent, was immediately after death crowned with that blessed longed-for crown. But being strengthened by the rising of the day-star, so that it was impossible for them to go back, and stretching forward to the things that were before, they grew more worthy of the bride's praises, they were called away by the death that is precious in the sight of the Lord. And where were they called, unless where the thief was promised he would be the companion of the bride, where Adam and Eve were to be purified, enriched, and honored, until they became perfect brides under the great teacher of love, under the great bridegroom of the perfect marriage who was to receive them? For paradise is midway between the debtors and those who attain perfection. Hence it is on the way. For it is not possible to go from one end to the other, except by going through the middle, through a mediator.

I beg you to receive these pointed arguments of mine, and to cure me by discussing them; for truly discussion with you is like ointment to me. Now, farewell.

Your Wessel.

Concerning the state of souls; and what it is to love Jesus.

1. Those who have died in the Lord have died by the death that is precious in his sight.

2. Those who have died in the Lord are more precious in his sight than were Adam and Eve in their original righteousness.

3. This more perfect love of those who have died in the Lord is worthier of paradise than was original righteousness.

4. The love of those who have died in the Lord, when strengthened, will no longer be affected by prosperity or adversity.

5. Those who have died in the Lord—being parts of his image—are purified, since in the time of the apostles, they baptized for the dead.

6. The love of all who have died in the Lord is not forthwith made perfect.

7. Imperfect love cannot make a heart perfectly pure.

8. So long as the purity of their heart is not perfect, men shall not see God.

9. "The path of the just is a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

10. When the light shines, when the light, I say, of wisdom, glory, and love shines more and more, then there is purification for those who have died in the Lord.

11. This shining light is that very teacher of wisdom, the Lord Jesus.

12. To be conformed to this light, to become like this exemplar in all things,—this is to be purified.

Unless our love for the Lord Jesus on account of our salvation, justification, and blessedness is very pure, it is but filthy rags and selfish love,—such love as a famishing wolf has for a lamb. For we ought to love without seeking anything for ourselves, or for anyone else except for God. To approach and to be conformed to this law is to be purified.

Those who have died in grace are in a better condition of grace than Adam was in paradise. For they are established in grace; and hence are endowed with such perfect wisdom, glory, and love, that no creature can separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. Therefore, being free from all fear of such separation they are perfectly united in the love of God in Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and glory and love,—hidden from us here, but not from those who have died in the Lord. Greatly blessed are they that see those treasures of God in Christ Jesus. For though they may not see God

himself, they are certain that they shall see him some day.

"If any man loveth not our Lord Jesus, he is anathema." But what is it to love, unless it be to wish above all else to be doing his commandments, to wish above all else that which he wishes, and because he wishes it? Jacob loved Rachel, and because of the great love he had for her, his seven years of toilsome servitude seemed unto him but a few days. What is it to love, unless it is to have a heart sealed with the heart of Jesus, so as to be able to think of nothing but him, according to the word, "Set me as a seal upon thy heart?" Then we shall wish nothing but what he wishes; we shall wish all that he wishes, and our only purpose will be that Jesus' heart may be our seal, our rule, our motive power, our pivot; the fruit of our labors; our measure, and our unalterable seal.

Love does not wait for a command. For a person, who waits for a command or works because of one, does not love. Inactivity would have been harder for Magdalene than compliance; not to follow, not to suffer with the Lord, would have been harder than to take up her cross, to be crucified at the same time with him. In the eclogue concerning Gallus and Lycoris it is clear that the love of Gallus was misplaced. And thus Vergil furnishes a great example of what is due from true love. There is no life except in love; no holy life except in holy love. Hence we ought to love the first-born Brother and through him be brought back to the love of the Father. For if we do not love him with a pure heart, we shall not see his face.

If any man loveth not, he is anathema; therefore in order not to be anathema, he must love. John clearly shows that the way to the love of God is through the love of the brethren, when he says, "He that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not?" This reasoning is not very convincing

without an explanation concerning the brother whom one sees. Let it be admitted that that brother is the first-born among many brothers, the first-born of all the sons of God, the king and priest, the sacrifice, the victim, the first fruits, the tithes, the peace offering, the whole burnt offering, the incense, the bridegroom and lover; he who comes, knocks, and appears; who was not received, nor esteemed, nor loved, although he was given to man by God to be all this and for such great purposes. He that loveth not such a brother, how can he love God whom he seeth not? For thus stated, the reasoning is clear and convincing. And the clearer the truth is, the more precious and the more to be cherished is love.

We ought to have love of the brethren; love, I say, such as we should have for such a first-born Brother; and—because of the first-born Brother—a love so great, that we would lay down our lives for the brethren. Nay more, we should have such love of salvation and our Saviour that the love of Jesus shall extinguish all love of self; otherwise he does not save his people from their sins.

Few men know true love, even for mankind; for love is not understood except through inward experience, etc.

No man knows a love that is worthy of the first-born Brother. If he knew the worth of that love, he would always pray as he ought, until he loved worthily.

The Apostle knew not how to pray as he ought. Did the Apostle enter without being purified from his ignorance? Did he enter without worthy love? Ought he to have been purified of that unworthiness of love? Then, purified by whom, unless by him who loved him, the master of love, the first example of brotherly love? And when is he purified? Surely, when the master of love shall will it. And where is he to be purified except in the place best fitted for the purification of love? And what place is best adapted for that? Not heaven, into which

nothing unworthy, weak, or vain shall enter. Not the prison of the captives; for love is nursed and increased through freedom. Then the most fitting place for this purification is paradise, which was at first reserved for original righteousness; which was promised to the thief, who died soon after by the death precious in the Lord, who was established forever—never to turn backward toward evil, who was already purer than Adam and Eve; for they were not established in the love of the brethren and in the love of God. For the path to love is through the purified love of the brethren; according to the word, "He that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not?"

Therefore, we must be trained to perfect love under the great master; at first by love of that which is seen; afterwards, to love of God whom we have not seen. Hence, they that see Jesus in paradise and all the treasures of wisdom, glory, and love hidden from us in him, are still only on the way, though they truly live a great and happy life. For while they see the first-born Brother of every creature, the most blessed created being, still they only see a creature, so long as their love is not made perfect toward God. For John clearly separates the brother, that has been seen, from God, who has not been seen.

Sacred Scripture cannot be taken in parts. For the entire Sacred Scripture is a single essential connected whole, because the smallest categorical part belonging to it cannot be false. Nay, all the law must be fulfilled, so that not one jot or one tittle is lacking, etc.

IX

EXTRACTS FROM THE LETTER OF MASTER JOHN OF AMSTERDAM TO BERNARD OF MEPPEN, PROCURATOR ZILAE, CONCERNING SUFFRAGES FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD, AND CONCERNING THE CELEBRATION OF MASSES, ACCORDING TO MASTER WESSEL

YOUR letter, my most affectionate Bernard, has caused me no little joy; I reply briefly in regard to the matters about which you now write.

You ask what I think about suffrages for the dead. I wish you to know that I unhesitatingly maintain and believe that prayer for the dead is beneficial, not only to him who prays, but to him for whom prayer is made, on condition however that the latter departed in grace. Hence the apostles also used to baptize for the dead. With what baptism, but that of prayer and groanings that cannot be uttered? It is very strange if our Master Wessel told you anything contrary to this, for this was the way in which he explained these matters to me. Just before his death I wrote to him at great length concerning them. That you may know more fully what he taught us on the subject, read the following propositions again and again; for I myself did not understand them at the first reading.

1. A suffrage is an aid to need, want, and weakness, divinely obtained by intercession.

2. The most powerful of all suffrages is the suffering of the Lord Jesus.

3. A suffrage issues primarily from him who obtains it, although principally from him who grants it; and it is effective both in him who undertakes and him who receives it.

4. Suffrages are dependent upon the discretion of him who grants them.

5. It is within the intercessor's discretion to intercede for anyone he pleases.

6. It is not within the intercessor's discretion to secure as much as he wishes.

7. That an intercession should result in a suffrage, small or great, is not within the discretion of the person who intercedes.

8. It does not follow automatically (*in opere operato*) that by mere intercession one's efforts will secure a suffrage for another.

9. The work wrought by the effort of the agent may become a suffrage, but only by extrinsic denomination.

10. No suffrage becomes a suffrage by intrinsic denomination apart from the change, growth, and progress of the inner man.

11. No suffrage is useful aside from the work of the agent himself, who obtains the suffrage through the love of the person that makes progress.

12. The works effected, aside from the works of those operating, do not serve as suffrages to anyone.

These propositions, my Bernard, assuming that they square with what he wrote to you, seem to me to contain sound sense. For when Master Wessel says that he does not wish prayer to be offered for him, except in order that he may be illumined by the bright light of the dawning day, i. e. the highest truth, he thereby merely desires your suffrages to be directed to the end, that the spirit of truth shall exalt his inner man by such an increase of spiritual light, that—at last—rendered pure in

heart he can lift clear eyes to the source of eternal splendor.

And as I judge it worth while to give thought to these considerations, I will proceed to state them more broadly:

13. Without the work of the agent, a mass does not become a suffrage for anyone.

14. A mass without all the appointed work of the celebrant may become a suffrage to the auditor through his own work.

15. A mass may be a suffrage for the one man and a judgment for the other.

16. A mass serves as a judgment to anyone who is not rightly disposed toward it, whether he hears or does not hear it.

17. A mass is a suffrage for anyone, so far as he is worthily affected by it.

18. A mass becomes a suffrage through the suffering of the Lord, but only to those who suffer with him and in proportion to the measure of their suffering.

19. A mass is of no avail to one who does not suffer at all.

20. For those who suffer perfectly in purgatory, the celebration of masses is unnecessary. This is clear because to suffer perfectly is to love perfectly, and he that loves perfectly is worthy of the throne rather than of purgatory.

21. Whether masses are celebrated or not, souls in purgatory will reign with Christ to the extent that they make progress in suffering with him.

22. A mass is nothing but the suffering of Christ and the co-suffering of him who recalls it.

23. The co-suffering of another, e. g. of the celebrant, does not avail for suffrage to those who are in purgatory, no matter how great the sacrifice or the co-suffering or the pious discretionary intercession may be.

24. The discretionary measure of obtaining the suffrage

is solely proportioned to the measure of the granting of it; and the measure of obtaining it is proportioned to the measure of participation; and the measure of participation is proportioned to the measure of acceptance of the co-suffering.

25. This gradation in the measure of pious suffrages is solely in the hand of God and of the mediator, the Lord Jesus.

From all these propositions we conclude that prayer for the living as well as for the dead should have as its end, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." It was stated above that the mass is unnecessary for those who share perfectly in Christ's sufferings. This, if I understand it aright, does not refer to every necessity, but is restricted to the need and want that may be removed by suffrages. For if masses were not celebrated, i. e. if the Lamb's flesh were not eaten in heaven, the souls in heaven would not live with that life, with which they live unto God. "I," said he, "appoint unto you a table, that ye may eat at my table."

It seems to me that the tenth proposition in the light of what is deduced from it accords well with the custom of the Church. For we say daily, "Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and may the everlasting light shine for them." What is the everlasting light but the spirit of truth or the seven eyes of the Lamb, which are the seven spirits sent forth into every man? And this light, as it grows in them, glorifies Jesus in them, and I add, the Father also. Now if the light glorifies the Father, it is plain that it also makes men rich in fruit, in accordance with the word, "herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." Hence, when the everlasting light is joined to the prayers of the suffragant for him who receives the suffrage, surely the tenth proposition is fulfilled. And since I think that eternal rest and the everlasting light are interdependent,

so that it is impossible for the everlasting light to be bestowed upon them (I speak of ordained power) without eternal rest, I am persuaded that I am right in claiming that our Master Wessel said he did not wish prayer to be offered for him, except in order that he might be illumined by the sun of righteousness. For without the illumination of the true light, rest of whatever sort was not worth while for him, etc.

X

A LETTER BY DOCTOR WESSEL OF GRONINGEN TO DOCTOR JACOB HOECK, THE THEOLOGIAN, CONCERNING ZEAL AND PIETY IN THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH WITHOUT ANY STUBBORNNESS OF WILL

REJOICING not a little at the result of our first conference and delighted with your reputation among good men, I congratulate myself on having found a man who sincerely reverences the truth; and particularly one who so courteously promises to be willing to reply whenever I write. I was glad to receive this promise, as I now found a chance to exercise in the old-time arena of debate. Not that mere verbal contentions delight me, as they once did; but because—now that my purpose has changed for the better—I may hope to benefit either myself or my neighbor.

I learned from your own lips that you had been displeased at some teachings of mine, and that you, in alarm had written about the matter to Cologne. For this I do not find fault with you. And yet I think it would have been more obliging and—by the standard of gospel rectitude—more neighborly, if, when I, your brother, sinned against you, you had shown me my fault, between you and me alone; and, if I would not hear you, had taken with you two or three witnesses excelling in faith and authority; and then at last, if I would not hear you, had denounced me. However, since you did not denounce the person by name, there is still ample room to apply this gospel rule. I beg you, my distinguished Master, to treat me with that

perfect sincerity for which you are far-famed. I beseech you, by the promise which you of your own accord gave me when I requested you always to reply to my letters, write to me if any word of mine ever displeases you. I admit that in my assertions I am frequently found to be singular; indeed being very suspicious myself of my unusual views, I dread not a little that I may sometimes be mistaken. But, inasmuch as the reasons that lead me to these conclusions have, as it seems to me, their origin in faith and in the Sacred Page, I long to give birth to them, and sometimes I even burst forth with them, hoping to be convinced and corrected by you or men like you, who are wiser than myself. You are not unaware of the benefit arising from convincing and correcting others, viz. that by effective and open argument they are brought back to the truth. You will, therefore, gain your brother, if you show me my sin when I offend you. I have never been stubborn, even in idle discussions. But now I think I should blush more than ever to deny the plain truth.

I have been in many universities, seeking discussion, and I have found many opponents. Sometimes, too, they have been offended at my belief. But never have they parted with me in offense. For when my reasons had been heard and carefully considered, I left them quieted, either agreeing with me, or at least admitting that my statements were not unreasonable; so that in the end no one made complaint concerning me.

XI

A LETTER BY THE VENERABLE MASTER WESSEL OF GRONINGEN, PROFESSOR OF SACRED THEOLOGY, TO MASTER ENGELBERT OF LEYDEN

YOU readily understand how greatly I—having had some slight experience as I think of your love—desire your welfare. I admit that once, when we were younger, you sent me some letters, which were by no means juvenile, but rather full of seriousness and worthy of a man, so that I have no reason to complain of the multitude (of my opponents). Now again your love glows and burns, so that you cannot refrain from writing at least a little, in order that I may see that you have retained a kindly remembrance of me.

I well believe that you could not refrain from writing. Indeed, that pious zeal of yours for the Church of God has become so ardent that you even lavishly load me with distinctions,—observing that I am exceedingly wise, that I have too lofty aims, that I investigate matters too boldly, that I am of the number of those who are tripped up by ambition; that—in my own sight—I am exceedingly wise and appear to be very learned, and that thereby I am pleasing to foolish men; that I contemplate things wholly beyond my understanding; that I love myself more than I ought, and that therefore my judgment upon and concerning myself is perverted.

By these and similar statements you do indeed clearly show how kindly a remembrance of me you retain, and

you have not ceased to make this clear in the years gone by. But truly I thank you and the multitude (of my opponents) for thinking as I do, and confirming my opinion of myself. For surely, as you add, there are innumerable other matters, "about which"—to use your own words —"I have no notion whatever." Therefore you warn me to be very prudent and to beware of wishing to be regarded as wiser than all wise men. For perhaps, if I have this desire, I shall not unjustly be regarded as foolish in the judgment of the wise.

With regard to these admonitions of yours, I thank you not a little, as I ought, for grieving so deeply over my faults. But I am also very glad to read what you add about that letter of mine, which I sent more than four years ago to our most venerable Master, Jacob Hoeck, the Lord Dean of Naeldwick. For, as he has not deigned to make any reply since then, I have been afraid he did not receive it. Now, however, I am not in the least in doubt about that. But I am waiting in suspense to learn how he regarded the letter. Still, in any case, I rejoice that he received it. And since he has given it to you to read, I beg him not to judge me unworthy of a reply, but to express his opinion in regard to it frankly. For I depend not a little upon him because of his reputation among the great. Moreover, if he deigns to write, let him, by the promise I now make to you that I will reply, hold me firmly bound always to answer him when he writes. And let him not think that I am making this promise idly, as he once did to me in the following words, "Now, if you do not scorn this letter, but deem it worthy of a reply, I shall not cease hereafter to inflict my writings more frequently upon you." Four years have already passed since I deemed it worthy of a reply. More than that, I have written in reply every year. But though, year after year, I have looked again and again for a re-

sponse from him, I have not been comforted by any, excepting at last, by this meager statement of yours, from which at any rate I can infer that he received my letter.

And indeed I thank you even for your taunts, because, although I do not think he agrees with you by any means, still—with regard to indulgences—I scarcely believe that he thinks as I do in every respect. For a wise and eminent man has many reasons to make him unwilling to publish his opinion among men of but ordinary ability. Therefore I dissent all the more from the opinion you expressed in regard to him last year, when you said he detested the teaching of the Nominalists. For it is hardly possible for such a man to have become prominent in the path followed by the Realists.

Now let me make ready to meet your invectives. You are annoyed at my statement that St. Peter and all the pontiffs following him did not have the power to grant or bestow a single hour of indulgences. You are so indignant at this that you impatiently exclaim, "Who is so blind, so unacquainted with Sacred Theology, so ignorant of pontifical rights, as to think that the pope or the bishops cannot by Christ's authority bestow an indulgence upon anyone?"

Here I am surprised that you, who from boyhood have been devoted to books and oratory, do not weigh your words more carefully. How can one grant by Christ's authority, unless he grants in accord with the will of Christ? If then one grants indulgences by the authority of Christ and in accordance with his will and his valuation of them, how, I ask, will you establish the claim that the will of Christ has determined that one and the same work of indulgence is worth—now six years, now seven, now seven hundred, now seven thousand, and now plenary remission? How can one determine that the pope's

estimate of a good work is exactly the same as that of Christ?

It is true that Peter and the apostles had the power of binding and loosing upon earth; but this they had in the exercise of their ministry, not of their authority. They had the power to provide the words of the gospel; and to believers they could administer the mysteries of grace, the sacraments of charisms, the precepts of salvation. And all who received these dutifully were truly loosed from the bonds of captivity to the devil. But I do not believe that Peter possessed the right either to loose whomsoever he pleased from the bond of Satan or to bind him therewith. For just as there is but one that baptizes in the Holy Spirit, so there is but one that binds and looses,—binds, I say, and looses with authority. But with what authority can the pope loose, when he does not know whether the person he has loosed is loosed from the bond of Satan or not? How can he judge what he does not know? For I reason thus: He cannot know those bonds; therefore he cannot discern them. If he cannot discern them, he cannot decide. But if he cannot decide, how can he absolve?

Even more shameful than this, however, is that subterfuge of some sainted Doctors, who admitting that only God forgives sins, deny that this is true of penalties, because there is thus afforded them a riper opportunity of deception. Yet it is a rule in theology that "the faithful ought not to assert anything that is not contained in the rule of faith." These inconsistent quibblers, however, violate this rule. The Lord Jesus said explicitly in regard to sins, "Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them." And in view of Augustine's dictum concerning this, they do not dare to interpret it except as it ought to be understood. As regards penalties, however, the Lord Jesus said nothing. Nor will the Sacred Scriptures furnish any passage whatever by which the judgment

of penalties due for past and altogether forgiven sins can be referred to the decision of the pope.

I admit that whose soever sins the apostles remitted, they were truly remitted unto them. But there are many forms of figurative speech. This is figurative speech. I, however, fight and contend, not in figurative, but in literal speech. Unquestionably, in the case of those who heard, received, and believed the truth of the gospel uttered by the apostles, who having confessed with heart and lips received the sacraments and obeyed the apostolic admonitions,—unto these the apostles—in the exercise of their ministry, not of their power—in some way forgave their sins. For they were cooperators with God in the world. And these sins were truly forgiven. For if they had not been truly forgiven by God, the statement would not be made that the apostles in some way did forgive them.

You add—and that too with considerable weight—that the Holy Church is governed by the Spirit of God. This is never altogether true even in those things which render it sacred and in which it works out its own salvation. But in matters in which it is ignorant, the Church certainly makes mistakes. Alas! we greatly lament its serious mistakes, especially in the salt that has lost its savor, in the steward that was accused of wasting his lord's goods, in the unwise and faithless servant, whom his lord set over his household to give them their portion of food, but who beat the manservants and maidservants. In tares of this sort, in the case of such persons who have been raised to positions of authority through the sins of the people, it is quite natural that some errors are sown in the Church. For they are men of that type whom Bernard of Clairvaux, in his sermon before the General Synod at Rheims and in the presence of the pope, called, not shepherds, not hirelings, not wolves,—but devils! Such errors alas!

were also scattered abroad through the most corrupt Indulgentiaries, who have in our day been condemned as forgers.

Nor must we attribute this error to the falsity of these men alone. Earlier Pope Sixtus knew of this error, and yet, in order to exculpate himself before the envoy of King Louis of France, he actually placed his hands over his heart and swore, on the word of a pontiff, that he did not know of it. But of what value was that exculpation, when afterwards knowing of it, he nevertheless dissembled and tolerated it? And it not only continued in France, but it spread until it even entered Holland. These and all things of this sort I believe to be errors, while you declare they must be sustained, believed, and fostered, for fear that, if you say that the Holy Church—which is directed by the Holy Spirit—errs in any respect, you may blaspheme. Such is your wisdom that you justify and sanction all the error of corrupt prelates, regarding it as impossible for avaricious pontiffs to commit any disgraceful act for the sake of base gain,—even in particularly perilous times.

The pope has power to grant plenary remission to those who are entirely contrite and who have made confession, just as he has the power to baptize a faithful catechumen in the Holy Spirit,—but only in exercising his ministry, not his authority,—nor on the ground that it is so, because he any more than any other lawful minister wills it. But he has that power because of his office, not because of his authority.

Moreover, if the truly contrite who have confessed have not done so perfectly, God grants them, not plenary remission, but only true remission. For, though they may indeed live in the Spirit, nevertheless—being babes in Christ—they still have need of much purification, growth, and perfection, in order to secure perfect remission. Because forgiveness is not granted, save to the contrite;

it is granted to everyone who is reformed in so far as he is reformed; and it is proportioned to his reformation. Many sins are forgiven unto him who loves much; but they are not perfectly forgiven, unless he loves perfectly. For plenary remission and perfect remission are identical.

No one, however, is so perfect in this life as to be without sin. Therefore plenary remission is granted to no one in this life. For no one obtains plenary remission, unless Christ—though absent to the sight—is present and through faith prepares him a place in his Father's house,—perfectly prepares a perfect place for him. Jesus has withdrawn from the sense of sight, but he remains within our spiritual vision; for through faith he dwells in our hearts. But the pope is not aware of the preparation of this place in the Father's house. Hence he has no power to command anyone to be received in the place that has been prepared. More than that, the pope himself, who knows the inmost workings of his own heart better than all other men, does not know as regards even himself how far his place in that house of the Father is or is not prepared. He knows not how to pray as he ought, so long as he is not made perfect in the wisdom of God. But advancing gradually, he learns by degrees what and how he ought to pray.

(A few years ago I sent our venerable Master several propositions, in which I thought my position was made sufficiently clear. If they were not received, or if they do not please him, kindly let me know and thus gratify me.)

I think it has been very loosely said that a person's sins may be forgiven and still not be covered in the sight of God. For how are his sins covered, if they are still imputed unto him for punishment? But how are they not imputed unto him, when he is punished for them? Is

it possible that the Lord has forgiven him, in order that the pope may hold him for punishment?

To you, however, these considerations do not seem to be reasons; or else—if I judge from your wish—I am to regard them as having greater authority than the gospel and the Church. Hence it follows that either these are no reasons or they have greater weight than that high authority. It seems to me, good sir, that you are very rash in expressing an opinion which is so readily refuted from one side or the other. Therefore, be more prudent and cautious in deciding as to the rest. And if anything in these statements of mine does not please you, confer with our venerable Master and reply in faithful accordance with his direction. All my work will be worth while, if I merit a reply of any sort from that beloved man. The one letter which he sent me is often in my hand and before my eyes. I wish him happiness and health, and I wish the same to you, my once beloved father and most respected Master.

Written at Pancratium, the very place where I received the letter which you dispatched on the 11th day before the calends of May.

XII

LETTER FROM JACOB HOECK TO WESSEL

JACOB HOECK, Dean of Naeldwick, sends greetings to Master Wessel.

Be assured, most worthy Wessel, that for a long time I have been no less desirous to write to you than you have been to receive a letter from me. But I either had no messenger, or—as happened more often—I was of necessity so busy in the tumult of secular matters that I had no time whatever to give attention to what you had written me, had I leisure for meditation. In fact it is because of my disposition to oblige that I fall into these snares; for I do not know how to refuse any request at all. But now, having obtained a good messenger to carry my letters, I have snatched enough time from sleep to set down my thought concerning you and your propositions, albeit only in a rough and disorderly fashion.

And first of all, I desire you to know that I have been in no wise deceived in you, inasmuch as from personal experience with you and from the perusal of your writings I have found you to be greater than the report of many great men had led me to believe. From your letters, however, I gather that you have one characteristic which in my opinion is extremely unsuited to a great man. This is that you pride yourself on your obstinacy and are bent upon having men find a certain singularity in all your statements, so that in the judgment of many persons you

are rightly called "The Master of Contradiction." And unquestionably, in view of your being a most learned man, your singularity gives offense to many. I frankly admit that I am of an opposite disposition, in that I am not accustomed, except for very strong reasons, to abandon the common paths of the ancient Fathers, defending rather than attacking them. You remember, I doubt not, that that distinguished man of our times, Buridanus, occupied the same position, for in the preface to his *Ethics* he says that he has often been deceived by the inventions of modern men, but never by the traditions of the ancients.

On the subject of indulgences, I cannot but differ with you; but I do not intend to assail you with arguments. For, I ask, what hope can I have of subduing with arguments that hard, unconquerable, undaunted head of yours, which yields neither to the hammer of common belief nor to the sword of the authority of the ancient Fathers? I shall merely set forth my own opinion and judgment in the briefest possible manner.

It is true that no explicit statement concerning indulgences can be drawn from Sacred Scripture and that nothing concerning them was written by the ancient Doctors, although it may be said, though I have not read it anywhere, that Gregory established septennial indulgences in connection with the Roman stations. Nevertheless I dare not, and I ought not, on this account to express the opinion—as you do—that the prelates, who practice and observe this custom, err. And really (not to conceal anything from you), it was because I was horrified at this unheard-of truth that I at first ceased to write to you, although I always hoped that you had announced this view for the sake of discussing and investigating the truth rather than by way of positive assertion. For you ought not to be moved to a positive assertion on the ground that nothing is to be found concerning indulgences in Sacred

Scripture and in the manifest teachings of the apostles; because you know that there are very many doctrines, which one must no less believe under penalty of fire than those which are contained in the aforesaid rule of faith. For "many things," says the Evangelist, "did Jesus, which are not written in this book." And this—to pass over the rest—is one of those things; for Peter was at Rome.

I have no doubt that you believe that sacramental confession is necessary to salvation. Yet, I do not know whether you would be really able to establish it unquestionably in the rule of faith. I know that a number of Doctors have tried to do this. But whether they properly established their point so as to convince a stiff-necked man, I leave it to you to judge. I have seen no one that satisfied me on this point, except Scotus. Still I should not be unwilling to say (and some persons are of this opinion) that although the obligation of sacramental confession was not mentioned in the books of the Evangelists, yet the apostles heard it from Christ, and that it has come down to us from the apostles by the authority of the Church, on which, as you must admit, you should place much dependence. Some of us would make the same assertion in regard to indulgences. You see whither these things tend. As for myself,—on this point at any rate, as the basis and foundation of our knowledge,—I heartily oppose you, firmly believing and asserting that the pope can decree, not only one hour, but many years of indulgences, and even plenary indulgence.

And yet you cannot believe me to be so foolish as to agree with most persons in thinking that whatever the pope decides in such matters shall stand unshaken, even if he is deranged while thus deciding. In a matter of this sort, that only is fixed which he decides, provided the key is not in error and Christ does not reject it. There comes to my mind the word of a man of admirable caution and

very great knowledge, our Master Thomas de Cursellis (whom you, I believe, knew better at Paris as the Dean of Our Lady); for to certain persons in the Council of Basel, who were unduly extending the pope's authority, he is reported to have said, "Christ declared to Peter: 'Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound'; but not, 'Whatsoever thou shalt *say* is bound.'"

Perhaps you will say, "A statement does not suffice unless one adds the reason for it." Really, my dear Wessel, you ought to regard as a strong reason—nay as stronger than any reason—the authority, not only of the pope, but also of all the prelates and Doctors, who either grant indulgences of all kind, or write and teach that they ought to be granted. You recall the words of Augustine, "I would not believe the gospel, if the authority of the Church did not compel me to do so." Do not most of the chapters in the body of the law approved by the Church also speak of indulgences? Does not the venerable Gerson seem to be of the same opinion, when he says, that the granting of indulgences ought not to be lightly esteemed, but rather ought to be devoutly considered in the faith, hope, and love of Christ, who gave such authority to men? "For," to continue with his words, "it is certain that, other things being equal, work that is based on such incentives is more fruitful and acceptable than any that is not." "Therefore," he himself adds, "it is sound and sober wisdom for a pious man to desire to secure such indulgences, without entering into any inquisitive discussion of their precise and sure value."

This same Gerson, in the beginning of the little work he wrote on indulgences, towards the end of which the aforesaid words are found, seems to be willing to base and establish pontifical authority of this sort on the Sacred Gospel. For, after citing the verse from Matt. XVIII, "Whatsoever ye shall bind," etc., together with several other

passages of the Sacred Gospel, he says, "Finally all power of conferring indulgences is based upon the foregoing." And although this honored Doctor thinks (and indeed rightly in my opinion) that no man, however pure, or even the entire Church, can bind a person in any way to mortal sin; yet—contrary to your judgment—he seems to wish that the dictum of Christ, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth," be understood as pertaining not to sins, but to penalties. In company with these men I declare and teach the above as the truth. And so, on this subject, as the chief point of our contention you have now learned my judgment, which—taking into consideration the character of my authorities—certainly has some value.

For my opinion in regard to indulgences is as follows: In sacramental confession, which sometimes makes the attrite person contrite, the everlasting punishment that is due for mortal sin is changed to temporal. Until this temporal punishment is computed and imposed by the priest, I think it is before the bar of God, and not before that of the pope. But when it is actually imposed, and the penitent—by the virtue of the keys—is obligated thereto, then I consider that the case is before the bar of the Church. The Church has authority over it; not that the decision lies with the pope, so that whatever he decrees in such cases holds at the bar of God because the pope so willed it, not that the pope can remit that punishment according to his will and pleasure; but because he can render satisfaction for such a person out of the treasure of the Church, and can substitute the merits of the saints and especially of Christ's suffering for such punishments. Nor is this assertion of mine proven false by your propositions, which were handed to me by my preceptor, Engelbert of Leyden. For in these you seem to use the words, "participation in the treasure," very differently from the Doctors of the Church in general, with the result that you

take issue with them, not as to the fact, but merely as to the words! Everyone concedes, with you, that the pope cannot bestow grace upon anyone, nor even decide whether he or anyone else is in grace. Much less can he command that anyone should be in grace. But that your conclusion (*intentio*) can be drawn from these concessions, I confess I do not see. For the only inference to be made from them is that the pope can neither qualify a man for indulgences, nor can he with certitude decide that he is qualified. This again everyone affirms with you. Nevertheless, all these premises or antecedents of yours actually lead, not to the consequent you deduce from them, but to its opposite, viz. that the pope can confer an indulgence, in the manner aforesaid, upon a truly contrite man who has confessed and fulfilled the required conditions,—or that, if the pope so decides it, he can even confer a plenary indulgence, so that such persons when released from the flesh will escape forthwith to the Kingdom.

And if with us you thus exalt the Church of our pilgrimage, you need not fear that you will blaspheme the King or give offense to the Kingdom of Heaven. For the impurity which you seem unwilling to admit into that most beautiful Kingdom arises in large part from the burdensome weight of the body upon the soul, and when the flesh is laid aside, it is forthwith washed away, and disappears. There are no impure thoughts then in the soul, and little of folly or cowardice or sloth. As for the deferment of holy desires, which you rightly say is the heaviest affliction for one who loves, God Himself takes that away by revealing the object of the desire. Neither is there any impure love there. But all things there are beautiful, all things are perfect of their kind. Nothing impure or imperfect exists there. And so it is not necessary for the soul that has gained plenary indulgence to be detained in purgatory to wash away that impurity or to be kept from

escaping at once, provided one dies in that state. Theologians call it purgatory, not because one there is purged from impurity, but rather is cleared from the punishments which are there paid.

But although what I have said is possible and ought to be taught and preached to the people, yet I can scarcely believe that even one out of a hundred thousand souls escapes immediately; and it is only as something peculiarly grand and glorious that I am accustomed to declare that this befell the most blessed Mother of God. For possibly, or rather surely, a man expecting to obtain an indulgence has some sin which he has not confessed either through forgetfulness or carelessness, for which he will suffer punishment in purgatory, unless he pays it here. Besides, who is there that dies at the very moment he gets the indulgence? Or rather who is there, that after obtaining one does not commit a sin of commission or omission? Moreover, all persons, as your own propositions clearly seem to intimate, remain in venial sin and transgress daily. In fact, no one asserts that these sins that remain have been forgiven. Nevertheless, the following condition with its conclusion remains true: that if anyone, being truly and altogether contrite, confesses, and fulfills the work required by the indulgence, the pope can grant him a share in the treasure of the Church. Therefore, if he is entirely contrite, and dies without committing any new sin, he will escape at once. Such was the indulgence that the supreme Pope, Christ, bestowed upon the thief on the cross.

Nor ought you, a learned man, to be surprised at these statements, since according to all the authorities contrition may be so great as to wipe out all guilt and punishment, and make it possible to escape to the Kingdom without any delay. Even an adult, however sinful and unlike Christ he may be, if he dies as soon as he is baptized, will appear

immediately in the Kingdom, white and pure and perfectly formed in Christ. Nor as you seem to dread will he make the Kingdom impure and turbulent by his reception there. Yet, if he had survived, he would have had need of much travail before Christ was formed in him.

I see that my paper is failing and so I stop. My statements concerning you and your propositions I have written hastily and in the midst of distractions, interrupted by the manifold and diverse variety of my occupations. I beg you, since you are less occupied, and therefore happier, to weigh what I have written rather confusedly because busy and intent upon other matters, and to write me again as soon as possible. It will be your task to extract from this letter the things on which we agree and disagree, and to bring us to the point of profitable argument. The Doctors of our school of truth, although they may be called Nominalists, usually do this better than those who are called Realists. And when this has been done, together with you I will gladly aim the arrows of our authorities at such error, as though it were a Roman standard. For the result of our compact, I hope, will be that at last the truth may be readily discovered in the most difficult questions.

God has not given me the leisure that he has given to you, Wessel. Nevertheless, I shall not postpone writing hereafter. As soon as I receive your letters, I shall always write. After this I cannot be so busy but that, as I have promised you once, twice, and even the third time, I shall always reply to your writings without delay, at least by dictating a little. Meanwhile, my dearest Master; Farewell.

Truly, your Dean, as you fully deserve.

Naeldwick, the 9th day before the calends of August.

XIII

A LETTER CONCERNING INDULGENCES BY THE VENERABLE MASTER WESSEL OF GRONINGEN IN REPLY TO MASTER JACOB HOECK, DEAN OF NAELDWICK

MAY he, who promised to be in the midst of those gathered in his name, be present in our conferences with his saving grace.

I thank you, my most worthy Master, for your esteem as well as for your long-desired opinion concerning me. And in order that you may discern my opinion better and more clearly, I—although averse to labor—have decided to reply at considerable length to your longed-for letter. Drawn by my desire to search into the truth, I ought not to be lazy, when an orthodox Doctor, and moreover one most devoted to and zealous for the truth, not only offers but seeks to confer with me, as I have long desired.

I especially ask and beseech you by the twofold law of love not to regard my singularity as ostentation,—as though I strove to secure a certain novelty in all my words. For if you could discern my mind and soul, you would surely judge that it was not ostentation, but rather humility, with which in penitent prayer before God I often knock at the ear of his mercy, lest, on account of my stiffneckedness, of which I sometimes justly suspect myself, he may permit me to be led away into some false view. Believe me, if I err, I am led astray not so much by willfullness as by dullness of mind.

Meanwhile, I have the calm and assured consciousness

that I have always sought, and still seek, the truth of the faith with deep concern. And when I find it, not only through such learned and highly esteemed men as yourself, but indeed through anyone,—be he most humble—yes even by myself, I am always ready to be corrected and to admit my error.

This I showed by what I did more than once at Paris. First, when, being called to Heidelberg, I disregarded the large promises of personal advantage which the Count Palatine offered me through the so-called Quappo, *pro tempore* Confessor of the Lord Archbishop of Cologne, and hastened to Paris with no other intention and purpose than, as a new and "singular" contestant, to confute the opinions of those two most famous Masters, Henry Zomeren and Nicolaus of Utrecht, and win them from the views of the Formalists to those of the Realists, to which I subscribed. This, however, I admit was arrogance on my part. But after meeting stronger men than myself, I perceived my own weakness; and before three months had passed, I yielded my opinion, and forthwith with all zeal searched the books of Scotus, Maro, and Bonetus,—writers who I had learned were the leaders in that school. Not content with that, before I had spent a year in studying as diligently and thoughtfully as I could the doctrines of Scotus, with which I began, I discovered graver errors in those than in the teachings of the Realists, and being ready to be corrected, I again changed my opinion and joined the Nominalists. And I frankly confess, that if I thought the latter held any views contrary to the faith, I am prepared to-day to return to either the Formalists or the Realists. And this is in accord with the opinion expressed by the blessed Augustine, XXIV q. III c. *dicit Apostolus* "Even if I do not acquiesce at once, I am not conscious of any stubbornness, when on account of my dullness I do not understand what others can accept more quickly

and clearly." To my mind the famous St. Jerome was as holy in argument and example as he was orthodox and catholic in his views. Yet, when he fell into a great and dangerous error that undermined the authority of all Canonical Scripture and was therefore worse than the error of Arius or Sabellius, he did not yield to the admonition of Augustine, but wrote a reply in defense of his opinion and in opposition to Augustine. Perhaps you will say it does not follow that there is any truce to be granted to-day. I do not dispute that. Nevertheless the precedent that was established is sufficient for my position. If indeed his scrupulous anxiety in searching into the truth, since he was sincere, defended St. Jerome from heresy, I do not believe that anyone is a heretic, who with solicitude seeks the truth, and on finding it accepts it with equal promptness.

CHAPTER I

You assert—and I do not deny it—that this singularity of mine offends many. Yet I am no less disturbed by their offense, against which, not to-day but thirty-three years ago, and with no striving after singularity, but rather, as it seems to me, because I was irresistibly carried away with zeal for the truth, I repeatedly maintained before all the learned men at Paris that from boyhood it had always seemed to me absurd and unworthy to believe that any man by his own verdict can increase the value of a good work in the sight of God,—for example doubling its value —simply through the accession or intervention of a human decree.

You admit that for very important reasons you sometimes abandon the ancient paths of the Fathers. Do you, then, consider as trivial and vain the reasons, on account of which the Fathers before Albert and Thomas, as they themselves testify in writing, abandoned this strange

doctrine of indulgences? For they declared that it was nothing but a pious fraud and a deceit with no evil intent, by which—through an error growing out of kindness—the people might be drawn toward piety. In those times, therefore, it was not believed by all men; and since the Fathers who held this view sought the truth with sincere solicitude, they were not heretics. To me, indeed, their reasons do not seem unimportant, for they abandoned the probable opinions of the pontiffs, because they felt compelled to admit the undoubted authority of Scripture. Let me state it more plainly: So long as the pope or a School or any large number of men make assertions contrary to the truth of Scripture, it should always be my first anxiety to adhere to the truth of Scripture; and in the second place, inasmuch as it is not probable that such great men are mistaken, I ought most carefully to investigate the truth on both sides; but always with greater reverence for the Sacred Canon than for the assertions of men, whoever they may be.

It is unnecessary to mention what great errors on the subject of indulgences the Roman court rashly assumed to be true and perniciously published,—harmful errors, which would be spreading to-day had not the sane sternness of a few true theologians stood in their way. You yourself are a witness and proof in these abuses, which you either saw at Paris or on your return practiced and permitted in the fatherland. You know whether it was piety founded upon a firm rock that caused you opposition. You know what reverence is due to ecclesiastical authority, and what to the catholic faith. You hold to an almost totally new distinction on this matter.

CHAPTER II

In order to add to the authority of the ancients, you cite the famous Buridanus, as an important witness to the

truth. And in this you truly are generous, since you grant me both the liberty and the incentive of following a great man, who speaks favorably and justly in behalf of ancient writers,—or rather the more ancient writers whose merit has been better tested and approved in coming down to us. For, when he says that he was never deceived by the traditions of the ancients, did he allude in any way to Albert, Thomas, or Scotus, or to any one of the entire School of the Realists or Formalists? As a matter of fact he regarded all these as belonging to the new School, and almost his contemporaries. This is quite clear through the entire course of his brilliant work. Wherever anything problematic occurs he defines it, not by the opinion of these writers, but by that of the Nominalists. Hence, the ancients, by whose opinions he—especially in his *Morales*—admits that he was never deceived, are, not these, but other men.

"On the subject of indulgences you cannot but differ with me"; but still you do not intend to assail me with arguments, having no "hope of subduing by arguments my hard head, which will yield neither to the hammer of common belief nor to the sword of the authority of the ancient writers." How is it, good sir, that you say you will not contend with arguments, as though I have merely adduced reason, and not faith!

I have touched upon the authority of the ancients to some extent, and will refer to it further when it is more opportune. But I see that the matter of "common belief" must be discussed more carefully, first with reference to the declaration of your own personal belief, then of the belief of the School, but especially that of the Christian religion. As for yourself, further on you openly assert that no one can decide with certitude; nor are you "so foolish as to agree with most persons that whatever the pope decides in such matters shall stand unshaken, if he

be deranged." You admit that "these statements are fixed, only when the key is not in error and Christ does not reject them." As though even the ministry of perfect love, inspired in the hearts of the faithful by the Holy Spirit, which Augustine defines as the only key of the kingdom, could be in error or Christ could ever reject the ministry of such a key!

CHAPTER III

You cite the distinguished and venerable Gerson, who is worthy to be cited and to be considered; for he strongly condemns many things in the abuse of indulgences. In the first place, in referring them chiefly to the authority of office rather than of jurisdiction, he says that in indulgences the former is more evident, more useful, more suitable. If this statement of that great man is strictly interpreted, in accordance with the truth it contains, does not the status of all indulgences as well as every assertion concerning them totter at once? For it declares that the ministry of his office on the part of a simple pastor or priest—through properly prescribed sacramentals—effects a more suitable, more useful, more evident, and thereby a closer approach to plenary remission than can be accomplished by all the plenitude of papal jurisdiction.

He also admits that men vary in their teaching concerning indulgences. Therefore there is no single unvarying doctrine at all concerning them. Now such variety of belief is not catholic; but rather tends to produce faction; for individual views beget individualism. But if you closely examine these brief statements of Gerson's, you will see that they grant the pope no authority whatever except through special papal jurisdiction, priestly office, or filial adoption. For we find these three sources of authority in the Church. The third belongs peculiarly

to the sons of adoption; and therefore the two remaining are for the Church's edification. According to Ambrose, an elder or a bishop does indeed exhibit his ministry in the authority of his office, but he does not exercise the rights of any authority. If therefore by reason of the authority of his office the pope has any power, he has it through jurisdiction. And according to the same Gerson, by that power he cannot directly and principally lessen any penalty except that which he himself can inflict, such as excommunication, suspension, disqualification, deprivation, or irregularity.

Furthermore, the same Doctor holds that only the supreme pontiff, Christ (excluding therefore the Roman pontiff), together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, can grant omnimodal indulgence from punishment and guilt with plenary authority; and, in granting this, he at the same time grants innumerable days and countless years of indulgence. In this weighty statement,—although added as if something unimportant,—you will discover the error of plenary remission; for it is as if he said the pope has no such immense plenitude of power.

The fundamental intention of the doctrine of indulgences is very strongly opposed by the word of this same venerable man, when he says, and says truly, that, in the justification of an unrighteous man grace is necessarily imparted to him before his sin is forgiven; and further that his guilt is forgiven before his sin. The reason underlying the first statement is that his "privation" is not removed except by a change in his fundamental character (*habitus*). The reason for the second is that the law does not punish anything except transgression. Therefore, when the transgression ceases, the punishment also will cease. Hence no guilt remains after a sin has been perfectly forgiven. For the entire cause of the guilt is

the sin or transgression. Therefore it is established or annulled convertibly in connection with the latter.

Besides the same venerable theologian expressly disapproves of indulgences of many years, which were found everywhere in the different concessions of the Roman pontiffs,—calling this an enormity. He therefore brands the pope with error, when he refers to the baseness of quæstors, and also when he asserts that general indulgences can scarcely save from sin, declaring that a donation is invalid, if it extends beyond the measure of the obligation. And holding to his former fundamental proposition that the pope cannot lighten any punishment except that which he himself can inflict, he adds—to enforce that statement—that no minister of the Church can bind anyone, except for temporal punishment.

The same venerable theologian recommends that the pope moderate his indulgences, lest they detract from both divine justice and mercy. If this counsel is sound—as it undoubtedly is—it is not given with regard to anything impossible or unavoidable; for counsel cannot apply to such things. Hence the pope through his indulgences can detract from divine justice and mercy. This, however, is impossible without doing violence to divine wisdom. But he cannot do violence to divine wisdom except by his own foolishness and error; and if he does, he sets a stumbling block in the way of the "little ones."

CHAPTER IV

Moreover in the same passage, that distinguished and venerable man makes some reflections, which are only in appearance absolute. For if they were absolute, they would not pertain to our subject, and would contribute nothing to the argument. If they concern indulgences at all, they must be understood in a relative sense. Thus

he says: "If anyone asks anything for himself, and asks persistently and piously—in Jesus' name—out of love, his prayer will be effectual. For it is founded upon the word, 'If ye shall ask anything of the Father in my name, He will give it you.'" If we consider the authority of these words as related to the granting of a papal bull, must we not conclude that it is better to depend upon the Word of the Lord than upon a papal bull?

On this point, however, I think we ought especially to consider and inquire how we should regard that name of Jesus, in which those who ask shall receive. For I do not think that such a profane and unworthy idea of the Lord Jesus, as was held by Caiaphas and Annas, would suffice to obtain a request at the hand of the Father. But there is another name, righteous and holy, and obviously sapiential; and he that possesses it knows how much he must suffer for Jesus' sake. We pray that this name, which begets wisdom concerning God and concerning Jesus, may be hallowed. I inquire, therefore, how much must we hallow this name of Jesus, and how fervent and ardent must our petition be, if we are to obtain all that we ask? For a petition may be more or less ardent. But granting that it is most ardent and is offered in the most hallowed name, must the pope's will intervene in order to obtain what is asked? If it need not intervene, then the above reflection by Gerson was inserted with good reason.

But especially earnest consideration should be given to his final statement that the surest sign of a salutary indulgence is that it enables one to do good and to endure evil. This, therefore, according to that venerable theologian, is a surer sign than a leaden bull following all the rules of the Chancellery, even granting that the pope, firm in his conviction and in the plenitude of his power, has signed it with his own hand. Yet this sure sign, if

not wholly perfect, is not absolutely sure. For the Prophet says, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Therefore, we should ask, "Contrite in what way and to what extent?" A heart is said figuratively to be contrite, when its personal pride and hardness have been crushed as between millstones. And what are these two millstones but those which this venerable Doctor mentions, viz. doing the good that God enjoins and enduring the stripes that He inflicts? These surely are the two millstones crushing the grain and the finest of the wheat, affording delight to the kings, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,—whom he thus calls kings in the plural, because they are more than one in person, since even the Sacred Canon in Hebrew speaks of the living Gods. This grain of wheat is broken and crushed by perfect contrition into the smallest particles, so that it retains no self-love whatever, and can say without restriction, "My heart is prepared, O God, my heart is prepared," i. e. "prepared both to run the way of Thy commandments, and prepared, O God, for Thy stripes." Surely if one can say that he is perfectly prepared for both these things, he will have that always sure sign of indulgences. But if he still retains any self-love, unprepared and uncrushed, though he may have a hundred bulls furnished with cord and fold and all the keys of the Chancellery or even with the iron keys, and even though he may indeed be truly contrite and have confessed,—so far God will despise him, because in his contrition and confession he is not absolutely perfect.

Therefore, according to the opinion of this venerable man, it is clear that papal indulgences are not so sure a sign of remission as is the perfect contrition of a heart crushed between the two millstones. But, by consent of the entire Church, it is certain that such contrition, if perfect, needs no papal bulls; and if less than perfect,

cannot be made perfect by the pope. The papal bull needs such contrition, in order to be plenary; and if the contrition is plenary, it does not need the papal bull.

These are my views concerning the distinguished and venerable Gerson.

CHAPTER V

But how are we to regard the other authorities, who disagree on indulgences with such a variety of opinions, that it is almost impossible to find two who are absolutely in accord with each other? You, together with Gerson and Bonaventura, oppose the Holy Doctor by saying that indulgences will not necessarily be worth precisely as much as they indicate. Bonaventura says that, in order to be valid, they must be sustained by a righteous cause. The Holy Doctor thinks that Saint Peter's prerogative is not safe and complete unless indulgences are worth precisely as much as is indicated; otherwise he thinks the universal Church cannot be defended against a damnable error. Thus he prefers to condemn the pope for the sin of unreasonable concession rather than for the error of false assertion.

You cite the common belief against me. What Carthusian monk or what Minorite of strictest observance, though absolved in the last moment of life by his Prior through a bull of indulgence, would not wish prayer to be offered for him after death? And who is there of the living who would not pray for him? You reply perhaps that he sinned venially after the absolution secured by the indulgence. Yet Pope Eugene wished to exclude such scrupulous sophistry, and declared that it was his authoritative will that these indulgences should be only for the last instant of life, in order that the dying might depart forthwith in grace. If you yourself were to die, fortified

by such indulgences,—I demand your honest confession,—would you still wish prayer to be offered for you or not? Would you still wish to pray for another who died thus, or not? And if you say, "Certainly," where then is that belief of yours that is common to all? How great, therefore, is this common belief, which no truly wise man completely trusts! Surely the first proof of belief is firm confidence.

CHAPTER VI

You admit that nothing was written by the Fathers concerning indulgences and no explicit mention of them was made in Scripture. If you mean that no positive mention of them was made i. e. in defense of the style and usual procedure of indulgences which has been customary in the Church, I quite agree with you. But if you intend your statement to be fully comprehensive with the idea that nothing whatever is found in Scripture either establishing or rejecting them, I am altogether opposed to you. For in my judgment, it was not the first pope, Peter, but the Holy Spirit through Peter, that put forth the one and only genuine bull of indulgence. And Peter attests its genuineness by stating that the entrance into the kingdom of God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ, is richly supplied by it. He likewise attests that it is the only bull, by adding that "he that lacketh the ten things enumerated in this passage, is blind, groping about with his hands, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins." Hence no other bull is to be received or admitted if it does not include this. All other bulls are superfluous. It follows, therefore, that something is found in Scripture concerning indulgences, for this passage speaks of an abundant entrance into the kingdom. What is an abundant entrance into the kingdom but plenary remission from punishment

and from guilt? And what else is this blindness, this groping about with one's hands, this having forgotten the cleansing from one's old sin but exclusion from the kingdom? According to my present conviction this is the one and only genuine bull of indulgences,—this which the Apostle Peter puts forth in the first chapter of his second Canonical epistle. Something, therefore, is found in Scripture concerning plenary indulgences, although not as they are popularly observed to-day. No successor of Peter can in any wise take from or add to the completeness of this bull.

CHAPTER VII

The ancient Doctors wrote nothing expressly concerning indulgences, because this abuse had not crept in at the time of Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, or Gregory. And yet "it may be said" (though you admit that you have not read it anywhere), "that Gregory the Great established septennial indulgences in connection with the stations of the cross in Rome." "Still on this account you dare not, you ought not to express the opinion as I do," etc. You say, "on this account." What, I ask, do you mean by "on this account"? Is it because it is "commonly said"? Or because you have "not read it anywhere"? You speak as though I expressed some opinion "on account of" one or the other of these things, as a sufficient proof of it. Now it would be altogether futile to express something as one's opinion for no better reason than that "it is commonly said." I must therefore infer that I—unlike yourself—express this opinion because I have "not read it anywhere." Yet it is not because I have nowhere read that Gregory the Great established those septennial indulgences in connection with the Roman stations that I am expressing this or any other opinion.

For it was all of thirty-four years ago that before the most learned men in Paris I repeatedly expressed this opinion and with greater sarcasm perhaps than shrewdness but not, I trust, without due consideration. And again at Rome, in the next to the last year of the pontificate of Paul II, in the papal Penitentiary, I expressed the opinion which I am now expressing to you, for which you are pleased to rebuke me. I expressed it to those three theologians, our Masters in Paris, William of Phalis, John of Brussels, and John of Picardy, being prepared to discuss this opinion of mine with them. Of these, the two first were from the pope's Penitentiary, while I, making the fourth person, was prepared to discuss with them, not my own reasons, but the Scriptures, which it seemed to me related to my opinion concerning indulgences. But our venerable Master, John of Picardy, who had recently come from Paris and had previously considered my arguments with no little earnestness,—as the other two had likewise done,—forbade me to give expression to my opinion. For he asserted that less than two months before his arrival among us, there had been in the Sorbonne in Paris a discussion from which not only did no one come forth better informed, but all withdrew more confused in mind than at the beginning. You may remember it. For I do not know but it was Paul's last year, when you were by no means the least in the school of theologians in Paris. On the day before, which was in the *carnisprivium* of the moon, I had been invited by the pope's chamberlain, Henry Dalman, to lunch in the Parliament Chamber. And while we were there, Master William of Phalis, whom I mentioned above, in jest whispered in the ear of John of Brussels, "I wish our Master Jacob Schelwert were here now." And both smiled; so that the chamberlain inquired the cause of the remark and the laugh. But when the former said it was due to my

singular opinion concerning indulgences, and I became not a little disturbed at the situation, the chamberlain took it in a way that quite comforted me, saying that this was nothing new. More than that, I afterwards heard even members of the papal court fully agreeing with my opinion, and expressing themselves even more freely than I did.

But now you add these words, "And really, (not to conceal anything from you), it was because I was horrified at this unheard-of truth that I at first ceased to write." What, I ask, is this truth that so great a man as you never heard of? And why did you shudder at it, if it is the truth? I beg you, if indeed you do not conceal anything from me, not to conceal this truth from me, so that I too may hear and learn this unheard-of truth from you. Do not cease writing me, at least on this point. For I truly declare to you that I am undertaking this discussion for the sake of investigating the truth. And I gladly undertake it, hoping through you and men like you—good rather than contentious—either to be instructed or to be confirmed in the truth, which from boyhood I have always sought in preference to everything else, and which I now seek more than ever. For the only way to life is through the truth. Moreover, I shall rejoice—not less but more—at being vanquished rather than victorious, since it is my progress rather than anyone else's that I desire, or ought to desire.

Hence I am not a little surprised that a wise man like yourself should judge me capable of making assertions hastily and thoughtlessly, and should think that I am influenced solely by this one negative statement, viz. that nothing is contained in Scripture concerning indulgences. I know, of course, that the Sacred Scripture alone is not an adequate rule of faith. I know that certain things, which were not written, were handed down to us through the apostles; and that all these traditions are to

be accepted like Canonical Scripture in the rule of faith. These two things alone and whatever by common consent has been evidently deduced from them as a necessary consequence constitute the only rule of faith. And I recognize this to be the only rule of faith from which no one can deviate without loss of salvation. Nevertheless there are many things outside of it, which must be faithfully believed,—that is, must not be rejected,—because of the piety which they evidently foster.

The usual teaching of the Church concerning sacramental confession, viz. that it was handed down to the Church by Christ through the apostles, is quite acceptable to you. I believe that this opinion of yours is right, since indeed it is confirmed by the general statements of John in his canonic writings and by the more specific words of James. Therefore, I admit that in this rule of faith I ought to depend on the authority of the Church, with which—not in which—I believe. I believe, however, in the Holy Spirit regulating the rule of faith and speaking through the apostles and prophets. I believe with the Holy Church, I believe in accordance with the Holy Church, but I do not believe in the Church, because believing is an act of *latria*, a sacrifice of theological virtue to be offered to God alone.

And farther on you add that some of our own number think that indulgences are likewise of the rule of faith. Who, I ask, are these? I admit that the venerable Antoninus, Bishop of Florence, a man possessed of such unusual nobility of character in life that to-day the tomb in which he rests is adorned with much wax, holds that it is heresy to maintain any opinion against the system of indulgences. But is Gerson who so forcibly and fundamentally branded the present system on this account a heretic? I see "whither these things tend." For if the men, to whom you allude, speak the truth, then everyone

that opposes them would strike against the rule of faith, because he would be opposed to the traditions of the apostles; and if he stubbornly persists he must be a heretic. But how, I ask, will these men of our own number establish—I cannot but speak of this falsehood with some warmth—this error of theirs? Was anything regarding it handed down by the gospel or by the customs of the apostles? Has anything been confirmed by an observance throughout the years since the apostles' time or by some continuous custom? That most zealous man mentioned above, the annalist Antoninus, who very strongly favored the aforesaid opinion, clearly admitted that he had not yet discovered when indulgences began. Nevertheless as if some stronger authority were needed to convince the Legalists and Canonists, he himself,—though a theologian, Doctor, and bishop,—affirms that John, associated with Andrew, left some writings concerning indulgences, that certain other Doctors mention them, and that Boniface VIII by the advice of the cardinals first formally established them. A worthy authority indeed, that it should be corroborated by the sanctity of so great a man! That famous Boniface did three grand things: he persuaded Celestine to give up the Apostolate; he asserted that the pope was lord of all; he established indulgences. "He entered like a fox, reigned like a lion, died like a dog." Antoninus also said that Boniface was of the opinion that plenary indulgences would last from centenary to centenary; that he assigned only three churches to be visited, the Lateran, St. Peter's, and the church of St. Maria Major. And this he did about the year of our Lord 1300. That being so, where during these 1300 years and why did that apostolic tradition slumber, especially if it is so apostolic that it ought to be reckoned as strictly accepted in the rule of faith? I do not think that anything that was settled by Boniface VIII or

Clement after him, or Gregory, ought to be considered in the rule of faith. The venerable Gerson said enough on this point. The very reverend Antoninus openly admits that Clement's numerous bulls deviated so far from the rule of faith, that he did not believe they were bullated. Yet those very leaden bulls are still preserved in the treasury of privileges in Vienne, Limoges, and Poitiers.

And you add that you "heartily oppose me on this point as the foundation and basis" of our discussion. What, I ask, is this foundation and basis that is so solid? Is it that the present course of indulgences, beginning with the instruction handed down by Christ's apostles, has come down to us through the continuous observance of it by the Fathers. You have made this the premise of your next conclusion. I suspect therefore that this is the foundation and basis on which you heartily oppose me. Or if you have anything else for a foundation and basis, declare it as the motive for your firm belief and assertion that the pope can decree plenary indulgence.

CHAPTER VIII

"This you firmly believe"; and yet "you are not so foolish as to agree with most persons in thinking that whatever the pope decides in such matters shall stand unshaken." You "firmly believe and assert that the pope can decree a plenary indulgence." And yet "if most persons agree in thinking that whatever the pope decides in such matters shall stand unshaken," in your judgment they are foolish. Both of these are your own statements; if the pope decrees a plenary indulgence, you firmly believe and assert it. And if you agree with whatever the pope decides in such matters, you are foolish; unless perhaps he decides something outside of or above this plenary indulgence. I do not see how you will square

these wavering words, so that they will go together. Such wavering words are not suited to your most consistent mind. You know our Nominalist school will not permit such inconsistency and incoherence in words. If you are not foolish like most persons, because you do not think whatever the pope decides in such matters will stand unshaken, then you will not be foolish, because you do not think that a plenary indulgence, upon which he shall decide, will stand unshaken.

And as though giving a reason you add, "even if the pope is deranged." Now if you did not add this as a reason, there would be no point in adding it. But if, as I judge, you do add it as a reason, then you agree with me in thinking it reasonable that the pope may be deranged in such matters. But I ask you how he can be deranged in such matters unless he deviates from the rule of faith through ignorance, perfidy, or malice. Surely if he grants useless and questionable indulgences from any one of these motives, he must be deranged.

You, therefore, cautiously take refuge behind a *condition* as though behind an impregnable wall, declaring that only that will stand unshaken which the pope in matters of this sort shall decide, "*if* his key is not in error and Christ does not reject it." What, I ask, is the meaning of this indispensable condition, "if his key is not in error"? What is this key of the kingdom of heaven? And what is the error of this key? You are obviously assuming a key that may err and at the same time be the effectual and lawful key of the kingdom, the key of the kingdom of heaven. O dreadful kingdom, if its gates, bars, bolts, and keys are such that through them error, falsehood, and ignorance can creep stealthily within!

The key, as Augustine explains, is love diffused through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the children of the kingdom. The Lord Jesus before his resurrection promised these two

keys to Peter when he said: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." In like manner be presented these keys after the resurrection—not to one—but to all unitedly, when he breathed on them, saying, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit; whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

These two keys, in Augustine's opinion, are never rejected by Christ, nor does it ever happen that they are in error. For he defines the keys of the kingdom as being: (1) love diffused through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the children of God, and (2) the Holy Spirit. And he says that to loose and to bind is to receive into fellowship because of the similitude of love or to exclude from fellowship because of its dissimilitude. And since to receive into the fellowship of similitude belongs to godliness rather than to authority, therefore not one among all the saints is prevented either by sex or condition from binding and loosing; nor is this binding ever rejected by Christ, since it never happens that it is in error.

If however you mean that the key is in error when he to whom the keys have been entrusted is in error, I do not dispute that. For I cling unswervingly to Augustine's opinion as expressed above, in which there is no fear of ambiguity arising from any wavering words. Nay, I entirely agree with your opinion, providing it be first admitted that even the most holy Pope Peter greatly erred, in order that the Church thereafter might know that it was not bound by the conclusions of high pontiffs, but that in case of disagreement every believer should be bound by the example of St. Paul—in defense of the faith—to resist the pope to his face and, if necessary, in the presence of all.

You cite the word of that venerable man, Thomas de Cursellis, who is of the opinion that the statement made to Peter was, "whatsoever thou shalt loose," not, "whatsoever thou shalt say." And you did well to cite his opinion, which is in the interest of truth; nevertheless, it does not make the matter sufficiently clear. For in order that Christ's word might become perfectly clear and indubitable there ought to have been a further statement as to how and by what means Peter could bind and loose. I therefore interpret the word thus: If a minister of Christ administers the word of faith or the sacrament of faith or the example of love in accordance with the teaching of Christ and the gospel, both those under his authority and those who hear him should faithfully believe that through his ministry of faith and piety he truly does loose and bind on earth what is loosed and bound in heaven; and if he attempts to loose or bind in any other way, what he does is of no avail. I think Peter and his successors were promised nothing but the salutary ministry of piety. And I shall hold to this, until a sounder doctrine is propounded to me by you or by others.

I am not a little horrified at your admonition that the pope's authority ought to have more weight with me than reason. Did the theological faculty at Paris regard the authority of Pope Clement of greater weight than reason —or even of any value whatever compared to reason— when they rebuked and corrected him for his temerity in laying commands upon angels; in responding to the votive gifts and wishes of those who had taken the cross by granting them the release of three or four souls from purgatory; and also in issuing indulgences remitting punishment and guilt? Nevertheless leaden bulls authorizing these errors are found to-day. Yet you admonish me in matters of this sort to regard the authority of the pope, not merely as a substitute for reason, but as superior to it! What, I

ask, am I to regard as reason in these matters? Is it not the Holy Scriptures? Do you wish to put the authority of the pope above the Holy Scriptures? The will of the pope and the authority of Scripture have not been placed on an equal footing, since the will of the pope must be regulated in accordance with the truth of the Scriptures, not the truth in accordance with the will of the pope. But to this foundation for your admonition as though it were insufficient, you add the authority of the prelates. And lest anything should be lacking at the top, you further add that of the Doctors. To cite the authority of the prelates, in my opinion, merely begs the question.

As for the Doctors, they—though not all of them—are of the opinion that indulgences should be granted only so far as they make for piety. And in this opinion some of them speak rather mildly, if it be granted that in many things they—like yourself—disapprove of the Church's forms and abuses. For they say that the granting of indulgences—to whatever extent—is a question that ought not to be regarded lightly but to be considered in the faith, hope, and love of Christ. I too think it ought not to be lightly regarded, for I sincerely prize the gifts of the keys to the Church in faith, hope, and the love of Christ.

CHAPTER IX

Further, the statement of Augustine which you quote concerning the gospel and the Church does not prove more than it contains. It is a statement with regard to the beginning (of faith), which does not imply any comparison. "I would not believe the gospel, if I had not believed the Church." Just as each one of that first multitude of believers might well have said, "I would not believe the gospel, if I had not believed Peter." So in my own case to-day, if I had not first as a little boy believed the members

of my household, and afterwards my teachers in school, and finally the clergy, I would not believe the gospel to-day. Nevertheless I believe the gospel more than any number of mortal men, just as I ought to do. Nay, even if I felt that all men disbelieved it, notwithstanding, I would still cling to the gospel rather than to them. In his statement, therefore, Augustine implied the beginning of a still small and infant faith. He does not compare the authority of the Church with the worth of the gospel.

That very many of the chapters of the body of the law speak of indulgences, I admit and regard as certain. For I know that the use of indulgences existed in the Church before the time of John XXII. And I do not deny that thereafter it was inserted in the Decretals. But I do not agree that I am bound to believe in indulgences on that account.

With regard to the moderation of the venerable Gerson, the reply that in my judgment ought to be made can be gathered in some measure from the foregoing statements. Christ gave distinct authority concerning the remission of sins; he made no mention of any authority for the remission of punishments. However, setting aside the question as to how authority for the remission of sins is to be interpreted, it may be granted that the belief in loosing sins is to-day quite general. Now Gerson is clearly of the opinion that in the remission of sins the bestowment of grace necessarily precedes the remission of guilt, because the remission of guilt is nothing else than the bestowment of grace. "Her sins which were many were forgiven, because she loved much." And according to him, the remission of everlasting punishment precedes resurrection from sin. In so far then as the minister of Christ cooperates with Christ toward these three ends, in so far he binds and looses solely in his ministry; for of course he concurs with him in word or ministry. But in ministering, neither the person

who looses nor the person who is loosed can know with what gifts enjoined by God in binding or loosing the former concurs. Nor does he possess any power or efficacy in himself in regard to these gifts. And if this opinion of mine observes and upholds the words of the Lord, what need is there of bestowing further authority upon the prelates? For if anyone does bestow such authority upon them, on what ground will he do so without finding it necessary to speak hesitatingly or falteringly in defense of it?

With reference to the ministrations of office as possessing sacramental effect, no one doubts that the effect follows if the recipient interposes no obstacle. That, however, is not the case in jurisdictional offices. And it is in order to remove this very restriction that most persons so extend jurisdictional authority as to include judicial power over the inner man,—which is perhaps going farther than they should.

As regards punishments, until I am better informed, I simply hold that the punishment is remitted together with the remission of sin, and that no one who is altogether free from a sin is thereafter liable to punishment. For the fact that cleansing is imposed is due to imperfect grace, and that with it certain venial sins still remain. But as these sins are not deadly, their punishment is merely temporal. If these points were asserted merely on the ground that they were reasonable, they would influence those who exert their intellect but moderately. Consider, for example, the word of the Prophet, "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered, and unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." But we have still clearer testimony concerning punishments, viz. that of John in his canonical epistle, "Perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment." This then is the consequent deduced by the Holy Spirit, through that

disciple whom Jesus loved, "Fear hath punishment; therefore there is no fear in perfect love." In accordance with this form of proof, I affirm the opposite proposition, "Those who need to be cleansed in purgatory have punishment and fear; hence they are not perfect in love."

I think the venerable Gerson was also of this opinion. For I know it was his understanding that the universal authority of the apostolic see ought to be regulated by and be regarded as depending on the truth of the Canonical Scriptures; and by no means that the truth of the Scripture depends on the will or authority of the pope, even if he is not deranged or mistaken. Therefore if that venerable man afterwards—or even in this statement concerning indulgences—says something that is considerably milder than what accords with the plain, theological truth, I think he is silently making a concession in the interest of piety, in order that the truth may not beget a stumbling block to the "little ones" through the malice of certain men. You know how kindly and complaisant and good he is, and how often he abandons his own opinion when others disagree with him. Nevertheless in this it seems very strange that this judgment is so far removed from what is true and right. Take, for example, the letter advising what and how one ought to desire, in which he warns men to shun logical exactnesses, with their manifold distinctions. Yet most of these are necessary for scholastic exercise. For who could ever attain to that apex of theology, to which Peter D'Ailly climbs, without definitions, divisions, argumentations, distinctions, and logical instances? I am speaking of disputations, where there is need of the sharp tooth of discussion; not of sermons to the people, nor of meditation Godward. How could Peter have shattered John of Montesono upon the wheel of the error of those famous fourteen conclusions, if he had not shown him his delusion by manifold distinctions

or by antecedent or consequent ignorance of syllogistic refutations? Theologians must have recourse to logic.

And pray how could Gerson himself have become so great a theologian without the aid of the most accurate logic of his Master Peter? For the latter did not merely convict John of Montesono, at whose condemnation Gerson himself was present and which he asserts was just; but the entire order of preachers from the University of Paris was cut off for fourteen years, because their bachelors in a certain zeal for the teaching of St. Thomas were unwilling to abjure the errors they were spreading. Gerson himself in the third part of the treatise he published against John of Montesono clearly states that this teaching was so thoroughly disapproved that it had no influence whatever in preventing the just condemnation of the Doctor of Montesono.

I think, therefore, that Gerson in his zeal for piety and edification, knowing by experience what widespread scandal arose throughout the Church of God from the obstinate contentions of the Scholastics, preferred to maintain a perversion of truth among the "little ones" rather than cause a schism or any stumbling block to love in the Church. And therefore his milder statements must be interpreted in the light of this purpose; just as we see the wisdom of a shipwrecked man in throwing his precious wares overboard in a storm, in order that he may save his life. In so doing he is evidently led by nature, since we do not at any rate suffer both evils, when we undergo the lesser in order to avoid the greater. Hence also I sometimes blame myself to-day, as I used to more often at Paris, for discussing this subject at all with those who are not fitted for it, and I only hope that at any rate it did no harm. I often consider you and those persons to be happy, who possess a more complaisant moderation in such questions. I suppose you have read Gerson's opinion in his

statement before Peter of Luna, as to how a common error sometimes results in the right. He says that during the prevalence of an error a wise man is bound either to do or to omit doing many things, which are of such nature that, if he should do or neglect them when the error ceases, he would be seriously at fault.

I think, therefore, that the prudent Gerson, after opening the eyes of careful readers by propositions which contain undoubted truth, purposely relaxed his strictness somewhat on account of contentious men, and was silent respecting the exact truth hidden within, for the sake of those who were slower of apprehension. Indeed, how shall we otherwise reconcile the great discrepancies we find in the opinions of this venerable man? For certain of these opinions so clearly support me, that I think of basing my premise upon them. Yet sometimes he agrees with you. Indeed in statements intended for the people he expresses certain opinions so mildly and gently that you can build on them in opposing me. Nor is this without value. For I think that you, after experiencing a storm just as he did, cite him in the same spirit of zeal for piety that he displayed in his writings. And if you act, teach, and preach in that spirit, I praise your wisdom.

CHAPTER X

I fully agree that in sacramental confession an attrite person is sometimes made contrite through penance, viz. when, by confession without interposing an obstacle to the sacramental covenant, he receives the promised grace of life. And he would not live by grace unless he received love in some degree. Indeed, without love he could neither live, nor could he be at all contrite or humble. For he who is not prepared to be ground to some extent between those two millstones is not yet humbled and

contrite. But the stubborn hardness of his heart still causes him to be despised in God's sight. If, however, he is perfectly contrite, he will not be bound to suffer punishment through the Church.

You remember, I am sure, those widely published words from Book IV of the Sentences, Distinct. 18, "Others indeed say that it is God alone, and no priest, that pays the debt of everlasting death, just as he also—of and through himself—quickens the soul within." For, even as he—of and through himself alone—quickens the soul, so he—of and through himself—covers the sins of the penitent. Because, just as he retained for himself the authority of baptism, so he retained that of penance.

But it is clearly admitted by all that in the remission of sins the priest has no part at all except in the administration of the sacrament. So in the sacrament of penance, the Lord operates in secret through the sacrament in accordance with the disposition of the recipient. For he—of and through himself—covers his sins, when in bestowing love he does not reserve him for punishment. And it is then that he pays the debt of punishment. For "love covereth a multitude of sins." And according to Augustine they are covered, when they are abolished through love. Hence he says: "For if God covereth the sins, he did not wish to notice them. And if he did not wish to notice them, he did not wish to consider them; and if he did not wish to consider them, he did not wish to punish them, but rather wished to pardon them." Again at the end of the chapter he draws this conclusion: "Hence it is clearly shown that God himself plainly releases the penitent from the debt of punishment. And this he does at the time when he illumines him from within by inspiring him with true and heartfelt contrition." Further in the Rubric he says that this is "a more correct opinion than that" mentioned in the preceding chapter, viz.

that "certain persons believe that the guilt is removed by God, but that the punishment is removed by the priest." In the eighth chapter he cites Ambrose to the same purport, saying, "The priest indeed performs his office, but he does not exercise the right of any authority." And again, "He only forgives sins, who alone died for sin." Likewise Augustine, "No one takes away sins except the Lamb of God, who alone taketh away the sins of the world." But how does he take away sins except by forgiving the debts? How does he forgive the debts except by a gift whereby we can fulfil the whole law, so that not one jot or tittle is lacking? For he forgives our past sins, who also preserves us from present sin and saves us from the sin that threatens us. But the two last, viz., present and future sins—both with respect to their punishment and guilt—are taken away only by the Lamb of God.

And that these words of Augustine are not opposed to the words of the Lord, "Whatsoever ye shall bind" etc., is logically shown by Magister in the words of Augustine. These words are to be understood as meaning that the Church's love, inspired by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who share in love and the Holy Spirit, forgives their sins, while it retains the sins of those who do not share in them. And in the same chapter it is expressly stated that according to Augustine these distinctions conform to the meaning, "Not whomsoever ye shall wish to bind or think of binding, but those on whom ye exert the true operation of righteousness and mercy." And in no other sense do I recognize your work upon sinners. Then he adds: "The Holy Spirit which has been given to all the saints who are united in love, whether known in the body or not, forgives sins. In like manner when anyone's sins are retained, they are retained by these same saints, from whom—whether unknown in the body or not—he is separated by the perverseness of his heart."

In accordance with this opinion of Augustine, which is in agreement with the former statement, to loose and to retain sins is principally the work of God alone. Yet through the gift of the Holy Spirit, who principally forgives and retains sins, the Church participates in it. And he adds: "Therefore sins are forgiven through the Church, when anyone joins the Church of the saints; and sins are retained through the Church, when anyone forfeits the love of the Church, being united to it or excluded from it by the Spirit of God which was given to the Church, through whom order and administration and government are maintained in the Church." For in so far as they co-operate with the Spirit in his share of the work, in so far they bind and loose on earth; and in so far it is bound and loosed in heaven.

So also the brother of the Lord in exalted and sublime words says, "He who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins." Yet how shall he convert him from the error of his former way, except through the wisdom that comes to one who walks in the right ways of God? But does this wisdom, rectitude, and walking originate primarily with the brother who converts the sinner? And must it therefore be said that he is absolutely the saviour of him whom he has recalled from his error? Has he covered him with the wide mantle of love, which will thus hide a multitude of sins? If so, every ordinary man, without possessing any ministerial right of rank or jurisdiction, solely because of his kindliness and complaisance and goodness, can recall another brother from error. And he who is recalled from error can glow with such love that truly many sins and many punishments will be remitted unto him. Must the remission of punishments and sins therefore be assigned to authority rather than to love? And can the blameless man understand the rectitude of the

ways of God rather than he who converts one from the error of his former way? Is therefore that conversion more important? But I return to Magister, who—in the same "Distinction" under the heading, "they also bind," —clearly holds that "the authority of priests is confined to ministering in the sight of the Church, just as the lawful priest did in leprosy, which he could neither sprinkle nor take away." And concerning this he cites St. Jerome's words, "Certain persons, not understanding this point, infer from the arrogance of the Pharisees that priests can either condemn the innocent or forgive the guilty, although with God the question is not the opinion of the priests, but the life of the accused." And Magister adds, "Here it is clearly shown that God does not follow the judgment of the Church."

CHAPTER XI

On the other hand it is your opinion concerning indulgences that, whenever an attrite person is made contrite by sacramental confession, the eternal punishment due to him is divinely changed to a temporal one. And so long as this is not computed by the official act of the priest, it remains a matter before the bar of God and is adjudged by him. Therefore there is no diminution of the punishment by an increase of love. But after it is computed by the priest's official act, it is before the bar of the Church, so that thereafter God does not extend it beyond the priest's computation. Therefore the diminution of the remaining punishment must not be attributed to an increase of love, and on this account the pope has authority over it. Yet you assert this opinion timorously; for you add: "Not that its decision lies with the pope, so that whatever he decrees in such matters holds at the bar of God, because the pope so willed it. Not that the pope can remit that

punishment at the pleasure of his will." Here it seems to me that you quite admit that the contrary assertion is very rash. But consider whether it is any less dangerous to assert what you then add, viz., "But because the pope can render satisfaction for such a person out of the treasure of the Church and can evidently substitute of Christ's sufferings for those punishments that have been computed by the priest and are thereby already brought before the bar of the Church."

At this point—using your own words—I ask you whether the fruits of the sufferings of our Lord lie so entirely at the pope's disposal, that whatever he decrees concerning their merit will on that account hold before the bar of God. Does their merit therefore avail before the bar of God only for the person whom the pope chooses, so that no one else can be the recipient of the accumulation of the Lord's sufferings? And does this follow simply because the pope wills it, so that—at his pleasure—by merely granting the sinner an adequate part of the Lord's sufferings, he can remit his punishment, which you assert, because of the confessor's computation, has become a matter for the Church to determine?

If you say that he can remit the punishment, not at his pleasure, but by his right, I ask: By what right, unless it be that of mercy and righteousness, as God in justice and mercy abolishes the past sins of the penitent and accepts him on account of truly present love, and in so doing makes him a sharer of that great whole burnt offering, incense, and treasure? But how can the pope do this, if the sinner does not so much as esteem this treasure? For a treasure implies esteem,—and that too most worthy esteem. No one, however endowed with imperial or papal authority, can give a treasure to a man who does not esteem it. But whether a person worthily or unworthily esteems the treasure of the Church cannot be determined of a cer-

tainty by the pope, as regards another or indeed himself. Moreover if anyone worthily esteems that treasure, he will obtain it and share in it, whether the pope presents it to him or not. Hence ultimately such temporal punishments remain to be computed only at the bar of God, although godly obedience on the part of those under the authority of the Church in humbly submitting for God's sake to ecclesiastical computation is acceptable to God and not unfruitful in His sight.

My opinion concerning participation in the treasure of the Church is this: I judge that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,—the triune and one God, the Word incarnate, the only begotten of God, who became the first-born among many brothers, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who by the intervention of death became the covenant,—he is the treasure of the Church. Every man esteems this treasure just so far as he knows and loves it. And in so far as he knows, esteems, and loves this treasure, so far he is restored to the image of God and Christ is formed in him. For it is only through three things that we become participants in that treasure, viz. by knowing the true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent and the Holy Spirit,—by knowing, I say, and esteeming and loving him. I do not see that I here use the word, "treasure," in any other sense than that in which all the Doctors of the Church should use the words, "treasure" and "participation." If I do, I beg you, show me wherein. I have elucidated my opinion as clearly as I can. And I rejoice not a little at this your opinion of my perverseness, on account of which you openly assert I take issue with the Doctors in general, not as to the fact, but merely as to the words. For I regard it as a most desirable thing to agree with the rest of the assemblage of Doctors, if the Scriptures are kept inviolate throughout. All agree with me, in the first place, that the pope cannot

bestow grace upon anyone; secondly, that he cannot decide whether he himself or anyone else is in a state of grace; thirdly, much less can he command that anyone should be in a state of grace. Truly he would be in very great grace, if he could efficaciously impart treasure to the needy inner man! For in that case the latter would wisely discern the treasure, he would gloriously and sublimely esteem it, he would ardently love it.

And after this you inconsistently object—as though it were a strong point—that you cannot see how my conclusion can be deduced from these concessions; as if I deduced it from these three alone! Did I not set as the basis of my position the perfect fulfillment and necessary observance of the first and great commandment, together with stedfast perseverance in it even until the day of the Lord? Did I not say that whatever is contained in Sacred Scripture, either concerning the use of a sacrament or concerning the authority of the ministers of the Church or concerning the efficacy of both, depends upon these two commandments for its interpretation and limitation? Did I not say that perfect purity of heart was essential for entrance into the kingdom? Did I not say that plenary indulgences are conditioned upon this one thing—perfect participation in the heavenly Jerusalem, and that perfect participation is conditioned upon perfect desire and love? Did I not base entrance into the marriage chamber upon the perfect preparation and adornment of the bride? Did I not base perfect impunity upon perfect immunity from sin? Did I not in view of these considerations say that the pope cannot decree entire impunity for anyone, because he cannot find anyone free from sin in this life,—for, though he may be truly contrite and may have made confession,—yet he is not perfectly contrite? And this not even the disciple whom Jesus loved presumed to affirm, for he said, "If we say that we have

no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

From these statements, together with the three which you grant are generally admitted and conceded, I think my conclusion can be deduced, unless perhaps the Doctors in general, even after fully admitting these to be stronger, say that indulgences still remain sound. But if they think so, I congratulate them, and not only admit but bewail and lament my own ignorance, in that I do not see how, if these ten points stand, the course of indulgences, which is customary in the Church and is so zealously and recklessly asserted, can stand secure. All these things, which I have mentioned, are necessary in such perfection that human vision is dimmed at the thought of it; and the pope has no power to effect their perfection. But when they are perfect, aside from any intervention of the pope, they will forthwith secure absolute impunity.

CHAPTER XII

I ask you to show me how the opposite of my conclusion can be true in view of these statements. Ability to prove a point is evidence of knowledge. You say that the Pope can bestow plenary indulgence, if the necessity requires it. I ask: What would be such a necessity? Could it arise outside the sphere of the universal Church, when, for example, it becomes necessary to repel by arms the military invasions of infidels? I do not think you can maintain any such necessity on account of the many dreadful things that occur under such conditions; for they are almost necessarily venial. Or perhaps it is the rebuilding or restoration of some sacred edifice that has been ruthlessly destroyed. I do not think you can be of this opinion either. Even if it were necessary to build up some monastery of celebrated sanctity, and men were actually devoting all their

means for the maintenance of these, I do not think that would be a sufficient reason to grant them plenary indulgence, so that they might escape immediately to heaven.

Especial attention should be directed to these words of yours, "if the necessity requires it." For if the necessity requires it, and the pope should not grant the indulgence, will such a just necessity on this account be deprived of its lawful right? Perhaps, then, some cause within the sphere of the Church will require it. But whatever it may be,—aside from the hinge of perfect love, on which it must depend and to which it must hold perfectly,—I say that I cannot faithfully believe or truly admit that, because of it, the pope can bestow plenary indulgence upon anyone, —no matter what its importance or nature may be.

CHAPTER XIII

You say that the truly contrite, when they are released from the flesh, if they are fortified with papal indulgences, will forthwith take flight to heaven. I am surprised that you, a most learned man, do not remember that that terrible fire is endowed with reason, because the fiery law in the hand of God must be written in our hearts; and that it will prove each man's worth. According to Augustine *De Verbis Domini*, Sermon 112, it is clearly a fire endowed with reason, proving each man's work by rational discipline, burning up the wood, hay, stubble, i. e. every evil affection; *De Civitate Dei*, Book XXI, Chapter 26. For surely it must be admitted that this is the spiritual foundation of which Paul speaks. And the things that are lawfully built upon it, the silver, gold, and costly stone, are not corporeal. Hence those things which are built upon it contrary to the law of spiritual building, the wood, hay, stubble, will not be corporeal, but spiritual. But if these seven things are spiritual, pray how can men

be so foolish and mad as to dream that the eighth, i. e. the fire, which is to prove each man's work within him, is corporeal? Can corporeal fire in any way discern or prove the works of the inner man, that are built upon that one foundation,—works which it cannot know? I think that the evil affections constitute love that is still imperfect in those that are freed from the flesh. St. Bernard, in his treatise *De Diligendo Deum*, admits that he had not yet attained love in such perfection, as to be altogether devoid of self-love except for God's sake. I think therefore that in those who have been released from the flesh love must increase, and become as different from and unlike itself as the heavens differ from the earth, and as perfect as is the perfect day compared with the light of a lamp; in accordance with the word, "The path of the righteous is as the light that increases unto the perfect day."

And further I think that it is on account of this unlikeness that the Lord Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed and to the sphere of heaven. He also attested this when he said concerning John the Baptist, "He that is lesser in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." How much greater? Surely as much as the midday is brighter than the light of a lamp. I admit, with you, that those that are freed from the flesh burn with far greater love than that with which John the Baptist glowed here on earth, in proportion to the clearer wisdom with which they are illuminated under the great shepherd and bishop of their souls, and in proportion to their more eager discernment of the praise and glory of God under the clear thundering of him who comes and knocks and is immediately admitted; so much more fervent is the fire of their love. For although John, while on the earth, was greater than many even most holy men, yet he was only a lamp.

All who die in grace, who, before they are released from

the flesh, watching by the light of a lamp, look for the Lord,—who are ready to receive him with expectation when they hear him knocking, and opening at once to him receive him for whom they have waited with great longing,—these exchange the light of the lamp for the morning star, for the light of the day-star rising within them. And under his happy leadership and favor, in order that they may grow worthily, they pray with Simeon—that they may be released from the flesh, and with the thief who was received into grace—that they may be received into paradise. There, God himself, as Ezekiel promises in the 34th chapter of his Eulogium, searches for his sheep and seeks them out. "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered abroad, so will he seek out his sheep; and will deliver them out of all places whither they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day; and he will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and he will feed them upon the mountains of Israel, by the water courses and in all the inhabited places of the country. He will feed them with good pasture; and upon the lofty mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they rest in the green grass, and on fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel." The Lord Jesus himself, their shepherd, shall feed his sheep and shall cause them to lie down. That which was sound among them he will cherish and that which was not sound he will cure, seeking for that which was lost, bringing back that which was driven away, binding up that which was broken, and strengthening that which was weak, guarding that which was fat and strong, feeding them in justice.

Hence the same shepherd and judge, even the faithful shepherd David, who was after the Lord's heart, doing the whole will of God, shall feed the sheep in God's flock

until the dawn shall give place to the break of day, and both dawn and daybreak shall give place to the rising sun. And then first shall the kingdom be handed over to God by the shepherd David, who shall at the last—after the universal judgment—hand it over to him altogether perfect.

This sequence in the guidance of souls from the lamplight of our present exile, in which the feeble wisdom of our faith is as a grain of mustard seed, and as a small center which must increase to the immensity of the celestial sphere,—this universal progress and happy growth of souls up to the rising sun,—this I think is purification. And I think that in this purification there is no punishment,—which is profitable for a little,—but that there is godliness, which is profitable for all things, and that that godliness is essentially purgatorial. Nevertheless godliness—nay the burning love that has been deferred—has its own weakness and punishment. It has also its happy consolation. It is consoled by the presence of the Shepherd and Saviour. But because of the Teacher and Evangelist sent by the Father, teaching them the love with which he himself loved and loves the Father, they too, imitating that love of his, begin also to glow with love.

But since they do not yet love worthily, they are still deferred and their soul is afflicted. This affliction is not grief, but sadness in accordance with God's will, and this, as though springing from the love of God, is so efficacious that it results in the growth of their love. And the sadder it is, the holier it is, and the greater is the growth of love that it secures.

Nor do I think that the happiness of paradise is any the less because, though there is a certain happy dwelling there at first, it is not a blessed abode that will remain forever. For I believe that the first and great commandment, that was laid upon Adam and Eve, as well as

upon the angels and ourselves, was to render service, not to be idle. Therefore in accordance with this law they would at least fight against self, and hence in accordance with this law they would offer a peace offering, sacrifice, burnt offering, and incense of themselves to God. For unless they are prepared both to do and to suffer, they do not make a blameless offering. A happy dwelling there, not a state of blessedness, was promised to our first parents. Nay if they had continued to be stedfast there, with favoring wind and prosperous voyage they would have hastened on, making great advance in perfecting love toward an abiding place of permanent citizenship. As it was then, so also now and always, it is necessary to be cleansed by the light of the rising dawn and the breaking day, until—shining with the perfect wisdom of God, gleaming with perfect praise of God, and burning with perfect love of God—they shall be judged worthy of seeing God, not in their own judgment nor any human judgment, but only by the decision of God who accepts them. And thus shall come that festal wedding day and that blessed entrance into the marriage chamber, to which no immature, youthful, menstruous concubine, burning with imperfect love, is admitted as worthy of it.

These things, most venerable Master, are more easily understood by those who are not unfamiliar with the opinion held by the Nominalists concerning the intension of step to step; just as the addition of part to part is summed up in extension. For they place the advancement of step to step in intension, and hence they think that everything has been arranged intensively, while the Peripatetics think that everything is continuously arranged by the addition of part to part in extension. By adopting the view of the Nominalists it becomes easy to understand that which should be taught, viz. that we ought to grow in love,—not love that shall pass away, but love that shall

abide both here and hereafter. It is necessary, however, that there should be a very large growth, before the immensity of that heavenly sphere shall grow out of the grain of mustard seed and before that midday light shall burst out of the small light of the lamp. But no matter how much men may grow, as long as there is any love of self in them, which prevents them from loving God, theirs is an evil affection, imperfect in love. For perfect love seeketh not its own.

Nor should we attribute this love of self to the flesh. For such love of self in the highest degree is found in him who is king over all the sons of pride; and yet he has neither flesh nor blood. This love of self, however small, is nevertheless termed evil by Augustine, as mentioned above. For it constitutes the spot in the wedding garment, it obscures one's crown, it mars the likeness and greatness of God. For what is more unlike God than to love anything else but God—and not for God's sake, since God loves nothing except for his own sake? I said the splendor of that kingdom, the brilliance of the marriage chamber, and the sanctity of the temple were polluted by these spots, by these blemishes, and on account of this unlikeness,—as when anybody, being thus polluted and menstruous in spite of the true confession and contrition by which we are received into grace, is put unworthily and entirely at random into the marriage chamber or temple, being sent through—or rather thrust in—by the pope. Nor does Augustine think that, as soon as the flesh is laid aside, all evil affections are laid aside with it, and that every imperfection of love passes at the same time into perfect love. And in this he is supported by William of Paris —see Part First, Chapter 100,—where he maintains his opinion at great length and with many arguments. Hence I believe that these evil affections are the sins which will be forgiven in a future age. Even there they cannot say

they have no sin, until the sun of perfect righteousness shall rise for them. Indeed I do not yet see by what point of the rule of faith the counter proposition can be established.

Hence I am exceedingly surprised at the general carelessness of the Doctors of our School in not being influenced by the authority of the Fathers of the early Church to distinguish purgatorial from punitive fire. Gregory Nazianzen speaks of a purgatorial fire which the Lord Jesus sent to the earth, desiring that it should burn. And since this fire is to purify the mental impurity of imperfect knowledge, of imperfect conceptions of God, and of imperfect righteousness, it will have to be capable of reasoning. Paul also intimates this when he says that that fire shall "prove"; now if it proves, it surely knows each man's work of what sort it will be. But he speaks of punitive fire as that which is prepared for the devil and his angels. For it is taking a very unusual and strange freedom with words to say that the fire purifies, if it removes nothing that is impure. It would be as strange a use of words as to say that a cure is effected by that which takes away a sickness that neither exists nor impends. It is doing violence to words if the names of active states cannot be defined by the mention or measure of the loss of their opposites. The fire is not only termed "purgatorial" by Latin writers, but it is called *καθαρτικὸν πύρ* by Greek writers. In both cases the term "fire" and "purgatorial" is used figuratively. But every figure is based upon a likeness. And a likeness rests upon a reasonable intelligence. Hence he that rejects it, makes war upon nature.

And you add: "the soul which has gained plenary indulgences, provided one dies in that state." I ask: In what state? In the state, in which one, who is truly contrite and has confessed and been truly restored to grace, has gained indulgences? I ask whether he gains plenary indulgences, if he has venial sins at the very time when he

is obtaining them? If so, then he will pass through with wood, hay, stubble built upon the foundation, and without being proved by the fire; and this would be in violation of the Apostle's law. If you say, he has no venial sins, then no one will gain plenary indulgence in this life, "for in many things we all stumble." And "if we say" even in the act of repenting, "that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." For not one of us fulfills the first commandment perfectly, no matter with what sincere confession or self-examination he receives the sacrament. Moreover we are commanded to pray always, "Forgive us our debts." Therefore we always remain and are debtors, and our debts will never be forgiven perfectly until we love perfectly.

You say, "provided one dies in that state." Again I ask: In what state? In the state of imperfect love, of many debts and venial sins, when he was gaining plenary indulgences, or rather when, deceived by an error—inasmuch as he was in a state of imperfect love—he believed he was gaining plenary indulgence? You wisely have a proper scruple about subsequent venial sins, admitting that they will annul preceding indulgences. Why have not you a like scruple about the venial sins that accompany them during the process of obtaining them? Will existing sins make an indulgence void any more than future sins? Who is there that in confession even remembered all his venial sins,—not to speak of worthily confessing and being contrite for them? And if he remembers them of what use would it be so long as he does not detest them with perfect zeal? And how can he be perfectly zealous, if he does not yet love perfectly? How was he possessed of perfect love, if he falls again afterwards? Who has not transgressed venially in the interval between the sacramental and the indulgential act? Indeed it is on account of this very scruple that certain men, in order

to strengthen indulgences and not be compelled to grant that they are invalid, used to say that the pope can even remit venial sin. For truly, if he cannot do this, he will not be able to grant any one plenary indulgence, because he cannot declare anyone to be free from venial sin. But that he cannot forgive venial sins is quite clear. For no one forgives sins of any sort whatever without efficaciously imparting the opposite virtues, just as no one takes away blindness and its disadvantages without granting vision and perfection of sight. For it is only to him that loveth much that many sins are forgiven.

Very pertinent here is the question which certain persons raise, whether Eugene IV was right in showing anxiety and pious solicitude to have it understood that all such plenary indulgences were to be adjudged at the last moment of death to those who depart in grace,—and only for the final instant, in order that they might not sin venially afterwards. For thus only would there be no hindrance to their enjoyment of the indulgences, on account of the obstacles of subsequent sins. You too believe that on account of the same obstacle of subsequent venial sins scarcely one out of one hundred thousand souls escape. But why then is not this truth preached publicly?

Nor do I like your idea that sins, which are not confessed by reason of an unconscious error of carelessness or forgetfulness, ought to be punished; as though unconfessed sins were not forgiven when over against them a man's love and sense of duty render him acceptable to God. For no confession removes sin, so long as it does not render one dutiful through love. Besides as a result of your position it would follow that these unconfessed sins remain to be imputed unto the sinner in a future age not only for punishment, but also for guilt. Here you are truly generous with me in admitting that no one can forgive the venial sins that remain. And you are still more generous,

when you add, "if he is perfectly contrite," as if you agreed with me that a person can be truly contrite, who is not perfectly contrite. And if the pope or a School should say that a perfectly contrite person escapes immediately through plenary remission, I should not be at all surprised. But I should be surprised if the pope causes him to escape.

You are exceedingly honest in setting forth the general opinion, by saying that—"according to all the authorities, contrition may be so great as to wipe out all guilt and punishment." But here I ask your opinion as to this question: How great will such contrition be? Will it be so great that, in accordance with Gerson's belief as expressed above, he will be absolutely prepared to do all good and to suffer all evil? For Gerson said that such contrition is the surest sign of indulgences. On the other hand is not contrition usually faint, weak, and feeble with regard to both doing and suffering, crippled in running the way of God's commandments, yielding, delicate, shrinking from suffering for Jesus' sake? Pardon me if I suspect that most persons in the matter of repentance are like myself. For such persons I know there is need of much remission; nay, not much, but plenary remission. Yet I also know that they will not obtain plenary remission, so long as they do not love plenarily, so that they are perfectly prepared to fulfil both of Gerson's conditions. Whoever, therefore, has need of indulgences because of such imperfect contrition, still has imperfect contrition. No contrition is imperfect except on account of imperfect love.

Again, I do not agree with you in holding that in baptism an adult obtains perfect remission,—and that by rule,—since by rule, if one does not interpose any obstacle to the grace of God, he is truly quickened in the Holy Spirit, and his sins though they be many are forgiven the culprit, if he loves much. But if in baptism and afterwards he loves but little, I judge him to be still a babe in Christ, and

in need of milk. For he that sins venially during baptism, sins indeed venially and yet is truly baptized. But in that he indeed sins venially, he builds indeed wood, hay, stubble upon the foundation. Such an one, therefore, does not build the throne of the kingdom with gold, silver, and pure costly stones. How then will he not pass through so as by fire, even if he expires immediately after the baptism? How likewise would not his imperfect wisdom, imperfect judgment, and imperfect love, which by rule are granted imperfectly in baptism, constitute an imperfect kingdom? How will Christ appear perfectly formed in these three imperfect parts of his likeness? Truly, if he does not there love otherwise than he did here in baptism, it will be a kingdom of languid love, built up with unseeing wisdom, wavering judgment, and sordid righteousness. Paul says these have need of milk, being unfit for solid food as yet. Peter warns them, "as new born babes to long for the milk belonging to the reason." Paul says that "so long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bond servant, but ought to be under guardians and stewards until the day appointed of the Father." And what is that day appointed of the Father but the day of perfect conformity to the example shown upon the mountain? For Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we may follow his footsteps. Indeed, because he suffered for us, he will not appear in us, unless, by the example he left us, we are resolved, and are quickened and kindled to follow his footsteps,—and follow them perfectly. And when we fulfil this perfectly, the day appointed of the Father shall come. How then can it be, that in violation of the law appointed of the Father, before the day appointed, and contrary to His will, this babe in wisdom shall be regarded at once as a citizen fit for that kingdom? I deem it unworthy that, at that table in the Father's kingdom, anyone should have need of

milk, as though he were as lacking in wisdom as a little child.

I too at the end of my letter see that my paper is failing. Therefore I close, not like yourself,—distracted because I am necessarily occupied in the interest of friends, but because I am entirely overcome by habitual laziness, except in so far as I am urged and drawn on by a longing for you. Hence also, in proportion, not to my longing, but to my customary sluggishness, by your orders I have written my reply more than quickly and only in accordance with my capacity to meet my opponent's points, indicating those things on which we either agree or disagree. I beg and beseech you that with reasons and authorities you contend with me to hit the bowman's target, in order that thus at last the very difficult truth in these assertions may as you demand be more readily discovered. I admit that you have not the leisure that I have. But I also lament the fact that in my sluggishness I have not the sharpness that you possess. Hence the task is not as fruitless to me as to you.

I exact only this one thing of you, most venerable Lord, Dean, and Master, viz. that you hold firmly to your promises that you will not postpone writing hereafter, and that as soon as you receive my letters, you will not be slow to answer. Indeed, you have now promised for the third time that you would reply to my letters either personally or by dictating a little. I admit I urge you ill-advisedly only if you think your own words are ill-advised for yourself.

And now our most venerable and dear Master, I wish you all happiness. Farewell.

Written at Groningen, September 19th, by your Wessel.

XIV

LETTER FROM DAVID OF BURGUNDY, BISHOP OF UTRECHT

BELOVED SON, WESSEL:

We command our blessing to abide ever upon you. We would have you know that we need you here in person at this time to give good counsel to our soul. I have many about me who esteem you greatly for your learning and character; but I do not hear them teach the truths that long ago you were accustomed to declare so faithfully.

I have long been aware of your brilliancy as a teacher and yet I know that there are many who are seeking to destroy you. This shall never be so long as I am alive to protect you. But come to me as quickly as possible, that I may talk everything over with you, and may have with me one in whom I delight my soul.

Farewell,

I am the unworthy Bishop,

Vollenhove, DAVID.

On the eve of the feast of Pontian,
in the year of our Lord, 1473.

XV

ALEXANDER HEGIUS SENDS GREETING TO THE MOST LEARNED AND EXCELLENT MASTER WESSEL OF GRONINGEN, WHO IS "THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD"

I AM sending you, most excellent sir, the Homilies of John Chrysostom. I hope the reading of them will afford you delight. For golden words always pleased you more than golden coin.

I have been, as you know, in the Cusan library. There I found many Hebrew books, altogether unknown to me; but fewer of the Greek. The following, I recall, were there: Epiphanius against Heresies, a very large work; Dionysius on the Hierarchy; Athanasius against Arius; Climacus; —these I left there. But I brought with me Basil on the Hexaëmeron and his Homilies on the Psalms; the Epistles of Paul together with the Acts of the Apostles; the Lives of certain Romans and Greeks written by Plutarch, and also his Symposium; some grammars; some mathematical works; some songs of deepest feeling concerning the Christian religion, composed as I believe by Gregory Nazianzen; some prayers, *εὐχαί*.

If you want any of these, let me know; they shall go to you. For it is not right that I should have anything that I would not share with you. If it will not inconvenience you to be without the Greek gospels, I beg you to lend them to me. You ask to be informed about my tutoring.

I have followed your counsel. For all learning is pernicious that is attended with loss of honesty. Farewell, and if you want me to do anything, signify it to me and consider it done.

From Deventer.

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